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by Damon Knight

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THE DOOR INTO SUMMER
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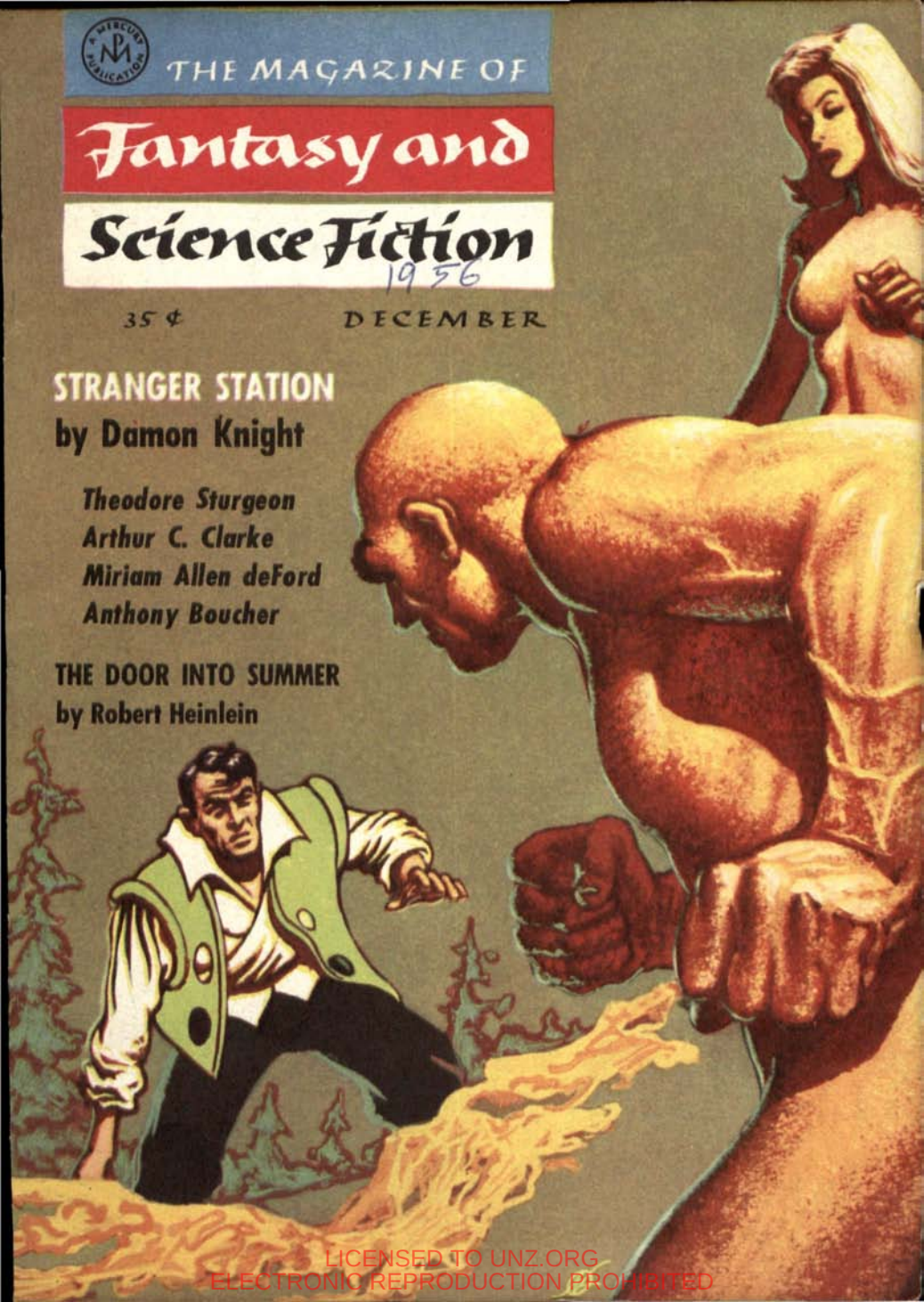

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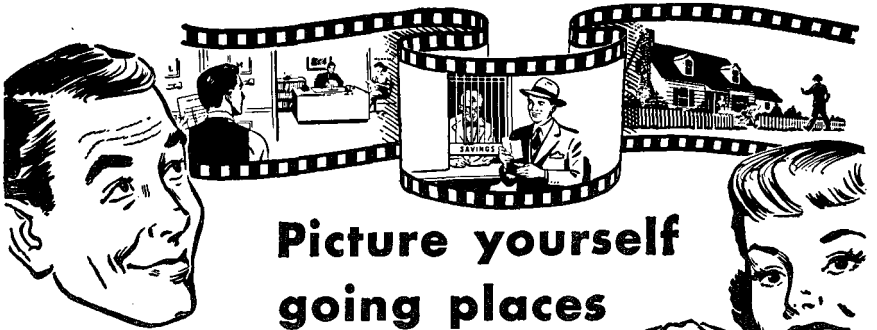

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THE MAGAZINE OF

Fantasy and Science Fiction

VOLUME 11, No. 6 DECEMBER

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(*Illustrating* "*The Door Into Summer*")

Joseph W. Ferman, PUBLISHER *Anthony Boucher*, EDITOR

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The recent collection of Damon Knight's stimulating and perceptive critiques of science fiction is called IN SEARCH OF WONDER; *for this is a search that greatly preoccupies critics and editors of s.f., as well as readers. Mr. Knight is fortunate in that he can sometimes find the objective of the search in the product of his own creative imagination: I have read few stories this year, in manuscript or in print, that so vividly evoke the sense of awe and wonder as this Knight novelet of alien contact in space, extraordinary in conception and compelling in execution.*

Stranger Station

by DAMON KNIGHT

THE CLANG OF METAL ECHOED HOLlowly down through the Station's many vaulted corridors and rooms. Paul Wesson stood listening for a moment as the rolling echoes died away. The maintenance rocket was gone, heading back to Home; they had left him alone in Stranger Station.

Stranger Station! The name itself quickened his imagination. Wesson knew that both orbital stations had been named a century ago by the then British administration of the satellite service: "Home" because the larger, inner station handled the traffic of Earth and its colonies; "Stranger" because the outer station was designed specifically for dealings with foreigners . . . beings from outside the solar system. But even that could not diminish the wonder of Stranger Station, whirling out here alone in the dark—waiting for its once-in-two-decades visitor. . . .

One man, out of all Sol's billions, had the task and privilege of enduring the alien's presence when it came. The two races, according to Wesson's understanding of the subject, were so fundamentally different that it was painful for them to meet. Well, he had volunteered for the job, and he thought he could handle it—the rewards were big enough.

He had gone through all the tests, and against his own expectations he had been chosen. The maintenance crew had brought him up as dead weight, drugged in a survival hamper; they had

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kept him the same way while they did their work, and then had brought him back to consciousness. Now they were gone. He was alone.

. . . But not quite.

"Welcome to Stranger Station, Sergeant Wesson," said a pleasant voice. "This is your alpha network speaking. I'm here to protect and serve you in every way. If there's anything you want, just ask me." It was a neutral voice, with a kind of professional friendliness in it, like that of a good schoolteacher.

Wesson had been warned, but he was still shocked at the human quality of it. The alpha networks were the last word in robot brains —computers, safety devices, personal servants, libraries, all wrapped up in one, with something so close to "personality" and "free will" that experts were still arguing the question. They were rare and fantastically expensive; Wesson had never met one before.

"Thanks," he said now, to the empty air. "Uh—what do I call you, by the way? I can't keep saying, 'Hey, alpha network.'"

"One of your recent predecessors called me Aunt Nettie," was the response.

Wesson grimaced. Alpha network—Aunt Nettie. He hated puns; that wouldn't do. "The Aunt part is all right," he said. "Suppose I call you Aunt Jane. That was my mother's sister; you sound like her, a little bit."

"I am honored," said the invisible mechanism politely. "Can I serve you any refreshments now? Sandwiches? A drink?"

"Not just yet," said Wesson. "I think I'll look the place over first."

He turned away. That seemed to end the conversation as far as the network was concerned. A good thing; it was all right to have it for company, speaking when spoken to, but if it got talkative . . .

The human part of the Station was in four segments: bedroom, living room, dining room, bath. The living room was comfortably large and pleasantly furnished in greens and tans: the only mechanical note in it was the big instrument console in one corner. The other rooms, arranged in a ring around the living room, were tiny: just space enough for Wesson, a narrow encircling corridor, and the mechanisms that would serve him. The whole place was spotlessly clean, gleaming and efficient in spite of its twenty-year layoff.

This is the gravy part of the run, Wesson told himself. The month before the alien came—good food, no work, and an alpha network for conversation. "Aunt Jane, I'll have a small steak now," he said to the network. "Medium rare, with hash-brown potatoes, onions and mushrooms, and a glass of lager. Call me when it's ready."

"Right," said the voice pleasantly. Out in the dining room, the autochef began to hum and cluck

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self-importantly. Wesson wandered over and inspected the instrument console. Airlocks were sealed and tight, said the dials; the air was cycling. The Station was in orbit, and rotating on its axis with a force at the perimeter, where Wesson was, of one *g*. The internal temperature of this part of the Station was an even 73°.

The other side of the board told a different story; all the dials were dark and dead. Sector Two, occupying a volume some eighty-eight thousand times as great as this one, was not yet functioning.

Wesson had a vivid mental image of the Station, from photographs and diagrams—a 500-foot duralumin sphere, onto which the shallow 30-foot disk of the human section had been stuck apparently as an afterthought. The whole cavity of the sphere, very nearly—except for a honeycomb of supply and maintenance rooms, and the all-important, recently enlarged vats—was one cramped chamber for the alien. . . .

"Steak's ready!" said Aunt Jane.

The steak was good, bubbling crisp outside the way he liked it, tender and pink inside. "Aunt Jane," he said with his mouth full, "this is pretty soft, isn't it?"

"The steak?" asked the voice, with a faintly anxious note.

Wesson grinned. "Never mind," he said. "Listen, Aunt Jane, you've been through this routine . . . how many times? Were you installed with the Station, or what?"

"I was not installed with the Station," said Aunt Jane primly. "I have assisted at three contacts."

"Um. Cigarette," said Wesson, slapping his pockets. The autochef hummed for a moment, and popped a pack of G.I.'s out of a vent. Wesson lit up. "All right," he said, "you've been through this three times. There are a lot of things you can tell me, right?"

"Oh, yes, certainly. What would you like to know?"

Wesson smoked, leaning back reflectively, green eyes narrowed. "First," he said, "read me the Pigeon report—you know, from the *Brief History*. I want to see if I remember it right."

"Chapter Two," said the voice promptly. "First contact with a non-Solar intelligence was made by Commander Ralph C. Pigeon on July 1, 1987, during an emergency landing on Titan. The following is an excerpt from his official report:

"'While searching for a possible cause for our mental disturbance, we discovered what appeared to be a gigantic construction of metal on the far side of the ridge. Our distress grew stronger with the approach to this construction, which was polyhedral and approximately five times the length of the Cologne.

"'Some of those present expressed a wish to retire, but Lt. Acuff and myself had a strong sense of being called or summoned

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in some indefinable way. Although our uneasiness was not lessened, we therefore agreed to go forward and keep radio contact with the rest of the party while they returned to the ship.

"'We gained access to the alien construction by way of a large, irregular opening . . . The internal temperature was minus seventy-five degrees Fahrenheit; the atmosphere appeared to consist of methane and ammonia . . . Inside the second chamber, an alien creature was waiting for us. We felt the distress which I have tried to describe, to a much greater degree than before, and also the sense of summoning or pleading . . . We observed that the creature was exuding a thick yellowish fluid from certain joints or pores in its surface. Though disgusted, I managed to collect a sample of this exudate, and it was later forwarded for analysis . . .'

"The second contact was made ten years later by Commodore Crawford's famous Titan Expedition—"

"No, that's enough," said Wesson. "I just wanted the Pigeon quote." He smoked, brooding. "It seems kind of chopped off, doesn't it? Have you got a longer version in your memory banks anywhere?"

There was a pause. "No," said Aunt Jane.

"There was more to it when I was a kid," Wesson complained nervously. "I read that book when I was twelve, and I remember a long description of the alien . . . that is, I remember its being there." He swung around. "Listen, Aunt Jane—you're a sort of universal watchdog, that right? You've got cameras and mikes all over the Station?"

"Yes," said the network, sounding—was it Wesson's imagination?—faintly injured.

"Well, what about Sector Two—you must have cameras up there, too, isn't that so?"

"Yes."

"All right, then you can tell me. What do the aliens look like?"

There was a definite pause. "I'm sorry, I can't tell you that," said Aunt Jane.

"No," said Wesson, "I didn't think you could. You've got orders not to, I guess, for the same reason those history books have been cut since I was a kid. Now, what would the reason be? Have you got any idea, Aunt Jane?"

There was another pause. "Yes," the voice admitted.

"Well?"

"I'm sorry, I can't—"

"—tell you that," Wesson repeated along with it. "All right. At least we know where we stand."

"Yes, sergeant. Would you like some dessert?"

"No dessert. One other thing. *What happens to Station watchmen, like me, after their tour of duty?*"

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"They are upgraded to Class Seven, students with unlimited leisure, and receive outright gifts of seven thousand stellors, plus free Class One housing—"

"Yeah, I know all that," said Wesson, licking his dry lips. "But here's what I'm asking you. The ones you knew—what kind of shape were they in when they left here?"

"The usual human shape," said the voice brightly. "Why do you ask, sergeant?"

Wesson made a discontented gesture. "Something I remember from a bull session at the Academy. I can't get it out of my head; I know it had something to do with the Station. Just a part of a sentence—*'blind as a bat, and white bristles all over.'* Now, would that be a description of the alien . . . or the watchman when they came to take him away?"

Aunt Jane went into one of her heavy pauses. "All right, I'll save you the trouble," said Wesson. "You're sorry, you can't tell me that."

"I *am* sorry," said the robot, sincerely.

As the slow days passed into weeks, Wesson grew aware of the Station almost as a living thing. He could feel its resilient metal ribs enclosing him, lightly bearing his weight with its own as it swung. He could feel the waiting emptiness, "up there," and he sensed the alert electronic network that spread around him everywhere, watching and probing, trying to anticipate his needs.

Aunt Jane was a model companion. She had a record library of thousands of hours of music; she had films to show him, and micro-printed books that he could read on the scanner in the living room; or if he preferred, she would read to him. She controlled the Station's three telescopes, and on request would give him a view of Earth, or the Moon, or Home. . . .

But there was no news. Aunt Jane would obligingly turn on the radio receiver if he asked her, but nothing except static came out. That was the thing that weighed most heavily on Wesson, as time passed: the knowledge that radio silence was being imposed on all ships in transit, on the orbital stations, and on the planet-to-space transmitters. It was an enormous, almost a crippling handicap. Some information could be transmitted over relatively short distances by photophone, but ordinarily the whole complex traffic of the space-lanes depended on radio.

But this coming alien contact was so delicate a thing that even a radio voice, out here where the Earth was only a tiny disk twice the size of the Moon, might upset it. It was so precarious a thing, Wesson thought, that only one man could be allowed in the Station while the alien was there, and to

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give that man the company that would keep him sane, they had to install an alpha network. . . .

"Aunt Jane?'

The voice answered promptly, "Yes, Paul."

"This distress that the books talk about—you wouldn't know what it is, would you?"

"No, Paul."

"Because robot brains don't feel it, right?"

"Right, Paul."

"So tell me this—why do they need a man here at all? Why can't they get along with just you?"

A pause. "I don't know, Paul." The voice sounded faintly wistful. Were those gradations of tone really in it, Wesson wondered, or was his imagination supplying them?

He got up from the living-room couch and paced restlessly back and forth. "Let's have a look at Earth," he said. Obediently, the viewing screen on the console glowed into life: there was the blue Earth, swimming deep below him, in its first quarter, jewel-bright. "Switch it off," Wesson said.

"A little music?" suggested the voice, and immediately began to play something soothing, full of woodwinds.

"No," said Wesson. The music stopped.

Wesson's hands were trembling; he had a caged and frustrated feeling.

The fitted suit was in its locker beside the air lock. Wesson had been topside in it once or twice; there was nothing to see up there, just darkness and cold. But he had to get out of this squirrel-cage. He took the suit down and began to get into it.

"Paul," said Aunt Jane anxiously, "are you feeling nervous?"

"Yes," he snarled.

"Then don't go into Sector Two," said Aunt Jane.

"Don't tell me what to do, you hunk of tin!" said Wesson with sudden anger. He zipped up the front of his suit with a vicious motion.

Aunt Jane was silent.

Seething, Wesson finished his check-off and opened the lock door.

The air lock, an upright tube barely large enough for one man, was the only passage between Sector One and Sector Two. It was also the only exit from Sector One; to get here in the first place, Wesson had had to enter the big lock at the "south" pole of the sphere, and travel all the way down inside by drop-hole and catwalk. He had been drugged unconscious at the time, of course. When the time came, he would go out the same way; neither the maintenance rocket nor the tanker had any space, or time, to spare.

At the "north" pole opposite, there was a third air lock, this one so huge it could easily have held an interplanet freighter. But

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that was nobody's business—no human being's.

In the beam of Wesson's helmet lamp, the enormous central cavity of the Station was an inky gulf that sent back only remote, mocking glimmers of light. The near walls sparkled with hoar-frost. Sector Two was not yet pressurized; there was only a diffuse vapor that had leaked through the airseal, and had long since frozen into the powdery deposit that lined the walls. The metal rang cold under his shod feet; the vast emptiness of the chamber was the more depressing because it was airless, unwarmed and unlit. *Alone,* said his footsteps; *alone* . . .

He was thirty yards up the catwalk when his anxiety suddenly grew stronger. Wesson stopped in spite of himself, and turned clumsily, putting his back to the wall. The support of the solid wall was not enough. The catwalk seemed threatening to tilt underfoot, dropping him into the lightless gulf.

Wesson recognized this drained feeling, this metallic taste at the back of his tongue. It was fear.

The thought ticked through his head, *They want me to be afraid.* But why? Why now? Of what?

Equally suddenly, he knew. The nameless pressure tightened, like a great first closing, and Wesson had the appalling sense of something so huge that it had no limits at all, descending, with a terrible endless swift slowness. . . .

It was time.

His first month was up.

The alien was coming.

As Wesson turned, gasping, the whole huge structure of the Station around him seemed to dwindle to the size of an ordinary room . . . and Wesson with it, so that he seemed to himself like a tiny insect, frantically scuttling down the walls toward safety.

Behind him as he ran, the Station *boomed.*

In the silent rooms, all the lights were burning dimly. Wesson lay still, looking at the ceiling. Up there, his imagination formed a shifting, changing image of the alien—huge, shadowy, formlessly menacing.

Sweat had gathered in globules on his brow. He stared, unable to look away.

"That was why you didn't want me to go topside, huh, Aunt Jane?"

"Yes. The nervousness is the first sign. But you gave me a direct order, Paul."

"I know it," he said vaguely, still staring fixedly at the ceiling. "A funny thing . . . Aunt Jane?"

"Yes, Paul."

"You won't tell me what it looks like, right?"

"*No,* Paul."

"I don't want to know. Lord, I don't *want* to know . . . Funny thing, Aunt Jane, part of me is just pure funk—I'm so scared, I'm nothing but a jelly—"

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"I know," said the voice gently.

"—and part is real cool and calm, as if it didn't matter. Crazy, the things you think about. You know?"

"What things, Paul?"

He tried to laugh. "I'm remembering a kids' party I went to twenty . . . twenty-five years ago. I was, let's see, I was nine. I remember, because that was the same year my father died.

"We were living in Dallas then, in a rented mobilehouse, and there was a family in the next tract with a bunch of red-headed kids. They were always throwing parties; nobody liked them much, but everybody always went."

"Tell me about the party, Paul."

He shifted on the couch. "This one, this one was a Hallowe'en party. I remember the girls had on black and orange dresses, and the boys mostly wore spirit costumes. I was about the youngest kid there, and I felt kind of out of place. Then all of a sudden one of the redheads jumps up in a skull mask, hollering, 'C'mon, everybody get ready for hidenseek.' And he grabs *me,* and says, '*You* be it,' and before I can even move, he shoves me into a dark closet. And I hear that door lock behind me."

He moistened his lips. "And then—you know, in the darkness—I feel something hit my *face.* You know, cold and clammy, like, I don't know, something dead. . . .

"I just hunched up on the floor of that closet, waiting for that thing to touch me again. You know? That thing, cold and kind of gritty, hanging up there. You know what it was? A cloth glove, full of ice and bran cereal. A joke. Boy, that was one joke I never forgot. . . . Aunt Jane?"

"Yes, Paul."

"Hey, I'll bet you alpha networks make great psychs, huh? I could lie here and tell you anything, because you're just a machine—right?"

"Right, Paul" said the network sorrowfully.

"Aunt Jane, Aunt Jane . . . It's no use kidding myself along, I can *feel* that thing up there, just a couple of yards away."

"I know you can, Paul."

"I can't stand it, Aunt Jane."

"You can if you think you can, Paul."

He writhed on the couch. "It's—it's dirty, it's clammy. My God, is it going to be like that for *five months?* I can't, it'll kill me, Aunt Jane."

There was another thunderous *boom,* echoing down through the structural members of the Station. "What's that?" Wesson gasped. "The other ship—casting off?"

"Yes. Now he's alone, just as you are."

"Not like me. He can't be feeling what I'm feeling. Aunt Jane, you don't know . . ."

Up there, separated from him only by a few yards of metal, the

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alien's enormous, monstrous body hung. It was that poised weight, as real as if he could touch it, that weighed down his chest.

Wesson had been a space-dweller for most of his adult life, and knew even in his bones that if an orbital station ever collapsed, the "under" part would not be crushed but would be hurled away by its own angular momentum. This was not the oppressiveness of planetside buildings, where the looming mass above you seemed always threatening to fall: this was something else, completely distinct, and impossible to argue away.

It was the scent of danger, hanging unseen up there in the dark, waiting, cold and heavy. It was the recurrent nightmare of Wesson's childhood—the bloated unreal shape, no-color, no-size, that kept on hideously falling toward his face. . . . It was the dead puppy he had pulled out of the creek, that summer in Dakota . . . wet fur, limp head, cold, cold, *cold*. . . .

With an effort, Wesson rolled over on the couch and lifted himself to one elbow. The pressure was an insistent chill weight on his skull; the room seemed to dip and swing around in slow circles.

Wesson felt his jaw muscles contorting with the strain as he knelt, then stood erect. His back and legs tightened; his mouth hung painfully open. He took one step, then another, timing them to hit the floor as it came upright.

The right side of the console, the one that had been dark, was lighted. Pressure in Sector Two, according to the indicator, was about one and a third atmospheres. The air lock indicator showed a slightly higher pressure of oxygen and argon; that was to keep any of the alien atmosphere from contaminating Sector One, but it also meant that the lock would no longer open from either side. Wesson found that irrationally comforting.

"Lemme see Earth," he gasped.

The screen lighted up as he stared into it. "It's a long way down," he said. A long, long way down to the bottom of that well. . . . He had spent ten featureless years as a servo tech in Home Station. Before that, he'd wanted to be a pilot, but had washed out the first years—couldn't take the math. But he had never once thought of going back to Earth.

Now, suddenly, after all these years, that tiny blue disk seemed infinitely desirable.

"Aunt Jane, Aunt Jane, it's beautiful," he mumbled.

Down there, he knew, it was spring; and in certain places, where the edge of darkness retreated, it was morning: a watery blue morning like the sea light caught in an agate, a morning with smoke and mist in it; a morning of stillness and promise. Down there, lost years and miles away, some tiny dot of a woman was opening her microscopic door to

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listen to an atom's song. Lost, lost, and packed away in cotton wool, like a specimen slide: one spring morning on Earth.

Black miles above, so far that sixty Earths could have been piled one on another to make a pole for his perch, Wesson swung in his endless circle within a circle. Yet, vast as was the gulf beneath him, all this—Earth, Moon, orbital stations, ships; yes, the Sun and all the rest of his planets, too—was the merest sniff of space, to be pinched up between thumb and finger.

Beyond—there was the true gulf. In that deep night, galaxies lay sprawled aglitter, piercing a distance that could only be named in a meaningless number, a cry of dismay: O,O,O. . . .

Crawling and fighting, blasting with energies too big for them, men had come as far as Uranus. But if a man had been tall enough to lie with his boots toasting in the Sun and his head freezing at Pluto, still he would have been too small for that overwhelming emptiness. Here, not at Pluto, was the outermost limit of man's empire: here the Outside funneled down to meet it, like the pinched waist of an hourglass: here, and only here, the two worlds came near enough to touch. Ours—and Theirs.

Down at the bottom of the board, now, the golden dials were faintly alight, the needles trembling ever so little on their pins.

Deep in the vats, the vats, the golden liquid was trickling down: *"Though disgusted, I took a sample of the exudate and it was forwarded for analysis. . . ."*

Space-cold fluid, trickling down the bitter walls of the tubes, forming little pools in the cups of darkness; goldenly agleam there, half-alive. The golden elixir. One drop of the concentrate would arrest aging for twenty years—keep your arteries soft, tonus good, eyes clear, hair pigmented, brain alert.

That was what the tests of Pigeon's sample had showed. That was the reason for the whole crazy history of the "alien trading post" —first a hut on Titan, then later, when people understood more about the problem, Stranger Station.

Once every twenty years, an alien would come down out of Somewhere, and sit in the tiny cage we had made for him, and make us rich beyond our dreams—rich with life . . . and still we did not know why.

Above him, Wesson imagined he could see that sensed body a-wallow in the glacial blackness, its bulk passively turning with the Station's spin, bleeding a chill gold into the lips of the tubes: drip, drop.

Wesson held his head. The pressure inside made it hard to think; it felt as if his skull were about to fly apart. "Aunt Jane," he said.

"Yes, Paul." The kindly, com-

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forting voice: like a nurse. The nurse who stands beside your cot while you have painful, necessary things done to you. Efficient, trained friendliness.

"Aunt Jane," said Wesson, "do you know why they keep coming back?"

"No," said the voice precisely. "It is a mystery."

Wesson nodded. "I had," he said, "an interview with Gower before I left Home. You know Gower? Chief of the Outworld Bureau. Came up especially to see me."

"Yes?" said Aunt Jane encouragingly.

"Said to me, 'Wesson, you got to find out. Find out if we can count on them to keep up the supply. You know? There's fifty million more of us,' he says, 'than when you were born. We need more of the stuff, and we got to know if we can count on it. Because,' he says, 'you know what would happen if it stopped?' Do you know, Aunt Jane?"

"It would be," said the voice, "a catastrophe."

"That's right," Wesson said respectfully. "It would. Like, he says to me, 'What if the people in the Nefud area were cut off from the Jordan Valley Authority? Why, there'd be millions dying of thirst in a week.

"'Or what if the freighters stopped coming to Moon Base. Why,' he says, 'there'd be thousands starving and smothering.

"He says, 'Where the water is, where you can get food and air, people are going to settle, and get married, you know? and have kids.'

"He says, 'If the so-called longevity serum stopped coming . . .' Says, 'Every twentieth adult in the Sol family is due for his shot this year.' Says, 'Of those, almost twenty per cent are one hundred fifteen or older.' Says, 'The deaths in that group, in the first year, would be at least three times what the actuarial tables call for.'" Wesson raised a strained face. "I'm thirty-four, you know?" he said. "That Gower, he made me feel like a baby."

Aunt Jane made a sympathetic noise.

"Drip, drip," said Wesson hysterically. The needles of the tall golden indicators were infinitesimally higher. "Every twenty years, we need more of the stuff, so somebody like me has to come out and take it for five lousy months. And one of *them* has to come out and sit there, and *drip*. *Why,* Aunt Jane? What for? Why should it matter to them whether we live a long time or not? Why do they keep on coming back? What do they take *away* from here?"

But to these questions, Aunt Jane had no reply.

All day and every day, the lights burned cold and steady in the circular gray corridor around the rim

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of Sector One. The hard gray flooring had been deeply scuffed in that circular path before Wesson ever walked there: the corridor existed for that only, like a treadmill in a squirrel cage; it said "Walk," and Wesson walked. A man would go crazy if he sat still, with that squirming, indescribable pressure on his head; and so Wesson paced off the miles, all day and every day, until he dropped like a dead man in the bed at night.

He talked, too, sometimes to himself, sometimes to the listening alpha network; sometimes it was difficult to tell which. "Moss on a rock," he muttered, pacing. "Told him, wouldn't give twenty mills for any damn shell. . . . Little pebbles down there, all colors." He shuffled on in silence for a while. Abruptly: "I don't see *why* they couldn't have given me a cat."

Aunt Jane said nothing. After a moment Wesson went on, "Nearly everybody at Home has a cat, for God's sake, or a goldfish or something. You're all right, Aunt Jane, but I can't *see* you. My God, I mean if they couldn't send a man a woman for company, what I mean, my God, I never liked *cats*." He swung around the doorway into the bedroom, and absentmindedly slammed his fist into the bloody place on the wall.

"But a cat would have been *something*," he said.

Aunt Jane was still silent.

"Don't pretend your damn feelings are hurt, I know you, you're only a damn machine," said Wesson. "Listen, Aunt Jane, I remember a cereal package one time that had a horse and a cowboy on the side. There wasn't much room, so about all you saw was their faces. It used to strike me funny how much they looked alike. Two ears on the top with hair in the middle. Two eyes. Nose. Mouth with teeth in it. I was thinking, we're kind of distant cousins, aren't we, us and the horses. But compared to that thing up there—we're *brothers*. You know?"

"Yes," said Aunt Jane, quietly.

"So I keep asking myself, why couldn't they have sent a horse, or a cat, *instead* of a man? But I guess the answer is, because only a man could take what I'm taking. God, only a man. Right?"

"Right," said Aunt Jane, with deep sorrow.

Wesson stopped at the bedroom doorway again and shuddered, holding onto the frame. "Aunt Jane," he said in a low, clear voice, "you take pictures of *him* up there, don't you?"

"Yes, Paul."

"And you take pictures of me. And then what happens? After it's all over, who looks at the pictures?"

"I don't know," said Aunt Jane humbly.

"You don't know. But whoever looks at 'em, it doesn't do any good. Right? We got to find out

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why, why, why . . . And we never do find out, do we?"

"No," said Aunt Jane.

"But don't they figure that if the man who's going through it could see him, he might be able to tell something? That other people couldn't? Doesn't that make sense?"

"That's out of my hands, Paul."

He sniggered. "That's funny, Oh, that's funny." He chortled in his throat, reeling around the circuit.

"Yes, that's funny," said Aunt Jane.

"Aunt Jane, tell me what happens to the watchmen."

". . . I can't tell you that, Paul."

He lurched into the living room, sat down before the console, beat on its smooth, cold metal with his fists. "What are you, some kind of monster? Isn't there any blood in your veins, damn it, or oil or *anything?*"

"Please, Paul—"

"Don't you see, all I want to know, can they talk? Can they tell anything after their tour is over?"

". . . No, Paul."

He stood upright, clutching the console for balance. "They can't? No, I figured. And you know why?"

"No."

"Up there," said Wesson obscurely. "Moss on the rock."

"Paul, what?"

"We get changed," said Wesson, stumbling out of the room again. "We get changed. Like a piece of iron next to a magnet. Can't help it. You—nonmagnetic, I guess. Goes right through you, huh, Aunt Jane? You don't get changed. You stay here, wait for the next one."

"Yes," said Aunt Jane.

"You know," said Wesson, pacing, "I can tell how he's lying up there. Head *that* way, tail the other. Am I right?"

". . . Yes," said Aunt Jane.

Wesson stopped. "Yes," he said intently. "So you *can* tell me what you see up there, can't you. Aunt Jane?"

"No. Yes. It isn't allowed."

"Listen, Aunt Jane, *we'll die* unless we can find out what makes those aliens tick! Remember that." Wesson leaned against the corridor wall, gazing up. "He's turning now—around this way. Right?"

"Right."

"Well, what else is he doing? Come on, Aunt Jane, tell me!"

A pause. "He is twitching his . . ."

"What?"

"I don't know the words."

"My God, my God," said Wesson, clutching his head, "of course there aren't any words." He ran into the living room, clutched the console and stared at the blank screen. He pounded the metal with his fist. "You've got to show me, Aunt Jane, come on and show me, show me!"

"It isn't allowed," Aunt Jane protested.

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"You've got to do it just the same, or we'll *die,* Aunt Jane—millions of us, billions, and it'll be your fault, get it, *your fault,* Aunt Jane!"

"Please," said the voice. There was a pause. The screen flickered to life, for an instant only. Wesson had a glimpse of something massive and dark, but half transparent, like a magnified insect—a tangle of nameless limbs, whiplike filaments, claws, wings . . .

He clutched the edge of the console.

"Was that all right?" Aunt Jane asked.

"Of course! What do you think, it'll kill me to look at it? Put it back, Aunt Jane, put it back!"

Reluctantly, the screen lighted again. Wesson stared, and went on staring. He mumbled something.

"What?" said Aunt Jane.

"Life of my love, I loathe thee," said Wesson, staring. He roused himself after a moment and turned away. The image of the alien stayed with him as he went reeling into the corridor again; he was not surprised to find that it reminded him of all the loathesome, crawling, creeping things the Earth was full of. That explained why he was not supposed to see the alien, or even know what it looked like—because that fed his hate. And it was all right for him to be afraid of the alien, but he was not supposed to hate it . . . why not? Why not?

His fingers were shaking. He felt drained, steamed, dried up and withered. The one daily shower Aunt Jane allowed him was no longer enough. Twenty minutes after bathing, the acid sweat dripped again from his armpits, the cold sweat was beaded on his forehead, the hot sweat was in his palms. Wesson felt as if there were a furnace inside him, out of control, all the dampers drawn. He knew that under stress, something of the kind did happen to a man: the body's chemistry was altered—more adrenalin, more glycogen in the muscles; eyes brighter, digestion retarded. That was the trouble—he was burning himself up, unable to fight the thing that tormented him, or to run from it.

After another circuit, Wesson's steps faltered. He hesitated, and went into the living room. He leaned over the console, staring. From the screen, the alien stared blindly up into space. Down in the dark side, the golden indicators had climbed: the vats were more than two-thirds filled.

. . . to *fight,* or *run* . . .

Slowly Wesson sank down in front of the console. He sat hunched, head bent, hands squeezed tight between his knees, trying to hold onto the thought that had come to him.

If the alien felt a pain as great as Wesson's—or greater—

Stress might alter the alien's body chemistry, too.

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Life of my love, I loathe thee.

Wesson pushed the irrelevant thought aside. He stared at the screen, trying to envisage the alien, up there, wincing in pain and distress—sweating a golden sweat of horror. . . .

After a long time, he stood up and walked into the kitchen. He caught the table edge to keep his legs from carrying him on around the circuit. He sat down.

Humming fondly, the autochef slid out a tray of small glasses—water, orange juice, milk. Wesson put the water glass to his stiff lips; the water was cool, and hurt his throat. Then the juice, but he could drink only a little of it; then he sipped the milk. Aunt Jane hummed approvingly.

Dehydrated—how long had it been since he had eaten, or drunk? He looked at his hands. They were thin bundles of sticks, ropy-veined, with hard yellow claws. He could see the bones of his forearms under the skin, and his heart's beating stirred the cloth at his chest. The pale hairs on his arms and thighs —were they blond, or white?

The blurred reflections in the metal trim of the dining room gave him no answers—only pale faceless smears of gray. Wesson felt light-headed and very weak, as if he had just ended a bout of fever. He fumbled over his ribs and shoulder-bones. He was thin.

He sat in front of the autochef for a few minutes more, but no food came out. Evidently Aunt Jane did not think he was ready for it, and perhaps she was right. *Worse for them than for us,* he thought dizzily. *That's why the Station's so far out; why radio silence, and only one man aboard. The couldn't stand it at all, otherwise.* . . . Suddenly he could think of nothing but sleep—the bottomless pit, layer after layer of smothering velvet, numbing and soft. . . . His leg muscles quivered and twitched when he tried to walk, but he managed to get to the bedroom and fall on the mattress. The resilient block seemed to dissolve under him. His bones were melting.

•

He woke with a clear head, very weak, thinking cold and clear: *When two alien cultures meet, the stronger must transform the weaker with love or hate.* "Wesson's Law," he said aloud. He looked automatically for pencil and paper, but there was none, and he realized he would have to tell Aunt Jane, and let her remember it.

"I don't understand," she said.

"Never mind, remember it anyway. You're good at that, aren't you?"

"Yes, Paul."

"All right. . . . I want some breakfast."

He thought about Aunt Jane, so nearly human, sitting up here in her metal prison, leading one man after another through the torments

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of hell . . . nursemaid, protector, torturer. They must have known that something would have to give. . . . But the alphas were comparatively new; nobody understood them very well. Perhaps they really thought that an absolute prohibition could never be broken.

. . . the stronger must transform the weaker . . .

I'm *the stronger,* he thought. *And that's the way it's going to be.* He stopped at the console, and the screen was blank. He said angrily, "Aunt Jane!" And with a guilty start, the screen flickered into life.

Up there, the alien had rolled again in his pain. Now the great clustered eyes were staring directly into the camera; the coiled limbs threshed in pain: the eyes were staring, asking, pleading . . .

"No," said Wesson, feeling his own pain like an iron cap, and he slammed his hand down on the manual control. The screen went dark. He looked up, sweating, and saw the floral picture over the console.

The thick stems were like antannae, the leaves thoraxes, the bud like blind insect-eyes. The whole picture moved slightly, endlessly, in a slow waiting rhythm.

Wesson clutched the hard metal of the console and stared at the picture, with sweat cold on his brow, until it turned into a calm, meaningless arrangement of lines again. Then he went into the dining room, shaking, and sat down.

After a moment he said, "Aunt Jane, does it get worse?"

"No. From now on, it gets better."

"How long?" he asked vaguely.

"One month."

A month, getting "better" . . . that was the way it had always been, with the watchman swamped and drowned, his personality submerged. Wesson thought about the men who had gone before him—Class Seven citizenship, with unlimited leisure, and Class One housing, yes, sure . . . in a sanatorium.

His lips peeled back from his teeth, and his fists clenched hard. *Not me!* he thought.

He spread his hands on the cool metal to steady them. He said, "How much longer do they usually stay able to talk?"

"You are already talking longer than any of them." . . .

Then there was a blank. Wesson was vaguely aware, in snatches, of the corridor walls moving past, and the console glimpsed, and of a thunderous cloud of ideas that swirled around his head in a beating of wings. The aliens: what did they want? And what happened to the watchmen in Stranger Station?

The haze receded a little, and he was in the dining room again, staring vacantly at the table. Something was wrong.

He ate a few spoonfuls of the gruel the autochef served him,

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then, pushed it away; the stuff tasted faintly unpleasant. The machine hummed anxiously and thrust a poached egg at him, but Wesson got up from the table.

The Station was all but silent. The resting rhythm of the household machines throbbed in the walls, unheard. The blue-lit living room was spread out before him like an empty stage-setting, and Wesson stared as if he had never seen it before.

He lurched to the console and stared down at the pictured alien on the screen: heavy, heavy, asprawl with pain in the darkness. The needles of the golden indicators were high, the enlarged vats almost full. *It's too much for him,* Wesson thought with grim satisfaction. The peace that followed the pain had not descended as it was supposed to; no, not this time!

He glanced up at the painting over the console: heavy crustacean limbs that swayed gracefully.

He shook his head violently. *I won't let it; I won't give in!* He held the back of one hand close to his eyes. He saw the dozens of tiny cuneiform wrinkles stamped into the skin over the knuckles, the pale hairs sprouting, the pink shiny flesh of recent scars. *I'm human,* he thought. But when he let his hand fall onto the console, the bony fingers seemed to crouch like crustaceans' legs, ready to scuttle.

Sweating, Wesson stared into the screen. Pictured there, the alien met his eyes, and it was as if they spoke to each other, mind to mind, an instantaneous communication that needed no words. There was a piercing sweetness in it, a melting, dissolving luxury of change into something that would no longer have any pain. . . . A pull, a calling.

Wesson straightened up slowly, carefully, as if he held some fragile thing in his mind that must not be handled roughly, or it would disintegrate. He said hoarsely, "Aunt Jane!"

She made some responsive noise.

He said, "Aunt Jane, I've got the answer! The whole thing! Listen, now, wait—listen!" He paused a moment to collect his thoughts. "*When two alien cultures meet, the stronger must transform the weaker with love or hate.* Remember? You said you didn't understand what that meant. I'll *tell* you what it means. When these—monsters—met Pigeon a hundred years ago on Titan, *they knew* we'd have to meet again. They're spreading out, colonizing, and so are we. We haven't got interstellar flight yet, but give us another hundred years, we'll *get* it. *We'll wind up out there, where they are.* And they can't stop us. Because they're not killers, Aunt Jane, it isn't in them. They're *nicer* than us. See, they're like the missionaries, and we're the South Sea Islanders. *They* don't kill their enemies, oh no—perish the thought!"

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She was trying to say something, to interrupt him, but he rushed on. "Listen! The longevity serum—that was a lucky accident. But they played it for all it's worth. Slick and smooth—they come and give us the stuff free—they don't ask for a thing in return. Why not? Listen.

"They come here, and the shock of that first contact makes them sweat out that golden gook we need. Then, the last month or so, the pain always eases off. Why? Because the two minds, the human and alien, they stop fighting each other. Something gives way, it goes soft and there's a mixing together. And that's where you get the human casualties of this operation—the bleary men that come out of here not even able to talk human language any more. Oh, I suppose they're happy—happier than I am!—because they've got something big and wonderful inside 'em. Something that you and I can't even understand. But if you took them and put them together again with the aliens who spent time here, *they could all live together—they're adapted.*

"That's what they're aiming for!" He struck the console with his fist. "Not now—but a hundred, two hundred years from now! When we start expanding out to the stars—when we go a-conquering—we'll have already been conquered! Not by weapons, Aunt Jane, not by hate—by love! Yes, love! *Dirty, stinking, low-down, sneaking love!"*

Aunt Jane said something, a long sentence, in a high, anxious voice.

"What?" said Wesson irritably. He couldn't understand a word.

Aunt Jane was silent. "What, what?" Wesson demanded, pounding the console. "Have you got it through your tin head, or not? *What?"*

Aunt Jane said something else, tonelessly. Once more, Wesson could not make out a single word.

He stood frozen. Warm tears started suddenly out of his eyes. "Aunt Jane—" he said. He remembered, *You are already talking longer than any of them.* Too late? Too late? He tensed, then whirled and sprang to the closet where the paper books were kept. He opened the first one his hand struck.

The black letters were alien squiggles on the page, little humped shapes, without meaning.

The tears were coming faster, he couldn't stop them: tears of weariness, tears of frustration, tears of hate. *"Aunt Jane!"* he roared.

But it was no good. The curtain of silence had come down over his head. He was one of the vanguard—the conquered men, the ones who would get along with their stranger brothers, out among the alien stars.

The console was not working any more; nothing worked when

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he wanted it. Wesson squatted in the shower stall, naked, with a soup bowl in his hands. Water droplets glistened on his hands and forearms; the pale short hairs were just springing up, drying.

The silvery skin of reflection in the bowl gave him back nothing but a silhouette, a shadow man's outline. He could not see his face.

He dropped the bowl and went across the living room, shuffling the pale drifts of paper underfoot. The black lines on the paper, when his eyes happened to light on them, were worm-shapes, crawling things, conveying nothing. He rolled slightly in his walk; his eyes were glazed. His head twitched, every now and then, sketching a useless motion to avoid pain.

Once the bureau chief, Gower, came to stand in his way. "You fool," he said, his face contorted in anger, "you were supposed to go on to the end, like the rest. Now look what you've done!"

"I found out, didn't I?" Wesson mumbled, and as he brushed the man aside like a cobweb, the pain suddenly grew more intense. Wesson clasped his head in his hands with a grunt, and rocked to and fro a moment, uselessly, before he straightened and went on. The pain was coming in waves now, so tall that at their peak his vision dimmed out, violet, then gray.

It couldn't go on much longer. Something had to burst.

He paused at the bloody place and slapped the metal with his palm, making the sound ring dully up into the frame of the Station: *rroom, rroom.*

Faintly an echo came back: *booo-oom.*

Wesson kept going, smiling a faint and meaningless smile. He was only marking time now, waiting. Something was about to happen.

The kitchen doorway sprouted a sudden sill and tripped him. He fell heavily, sliding on the floor, and lay without moving beneath the slick gleam of the autochef.

The pressure was too great: the autochef's clucking was swallowed up in the ringing pressure, and the tall gray walls buckled slowly in. . . .

The Station lurched.

Wesson felt it through his chest, palms, knees and elbows: the floor was plucked away for an instant and then swung back.

The pain in his skull relaxed its grip a little. Wesson tried to get to his feet.

There was an electric silence in the Station. On the second try, he got up and leaned his back against a wall. *Cluck,* said the autochef suddenly, hysterically, and the vent popped open, but nothing came out.

He listened, straining to hear. What?

The Station bounced beneath him, making his feet jump like a puppet's; the wall slapped his back

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hard, shuddered and was still; but far off through the metal cage came a long angry groan of metal, echoing, diminishing, dying. Then silence again.

The Station held its breath. All the myriad clickings and pulses in the walls were suspended; in the empty rooms the lights burned with a yellow glare, and the air hung stagnant and still. The console lights in the living room glowed like witchfires. Water in the dropped bowl, at the bottom of the shower stall, shone like quicksilver, waiting.

The third shock came. Wesson found himself on his hands and knees, the jolt still tingling in the bones of his body, staring at the floor. The sound that filled the room ebbed away slowly and ran down into the silences: a resonant metallic hollow sound, shuddering away now along the girders and hull plates, rattling tinnily into bolts and fittings, diminishing, noiseless, gone. The silence pressed down again.

The floor leaped painfully under his body: one great resonant blow that shook him from head to foot.

A muted echo of that blow came a few seconds later, as if the shock had traveled across the Station and back.

The bed, Wesson thought, and scrambled on hands and knees through the doorway, along a floor curiously tilted, until he reached the rubbery block.

The room burst visibly upward around him, squeezing the block flat. It dropped back as violently, leaving Wesson bouncing helpless on the mattress, his limbs flying. It came to rest, in a long reluctant groan of metal.

Wesson rolled up on one elbow, thinking incoherently, *Air, the air lock.* Another blow slammed him down into the mattress, pinched his lungs shut, while the room danced grotesquely over his head. Gasping for breath in the ringing silence, Wesson felt a slow icy chill rolling toward him across the room . . . and there was a pungent smell in the air. *Ammonia!* he thought; and the odorless, smothering methane with it.

His cell was breached. The burst membrane was fatal: the alien's atmosphere would kill him.

Wesson surged to his feet. The next shock caught him off balance, dashed him to the floor. He arose again, dazed and limping; he was still thinking confusedly, *The air lock, get out.*

When he was halfway to the door, all the ceiling lights went out at once. The darkness was like a blanket around his head. It was bitter cold now in the room, and the pungent smell was sharper. Coughing, Wesson hurried forward. The floor lurched under his feet.

Only the golden indicators burned now: full to the top, the deep vats brimming, golden-

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lipped, gravid, a month before the time. Wesson shuddered.

Water spurted in the bathroom, hissing steadily on the tiles, rattling in the plastic bowl at the bottom of the shower stall. The lights winked on and off again. In the dining room, he heard the autochef clucking and sighing. The freezing wind blew harder: he was numb with cold to the hips. It seemed to Wesson abruptly that he was not at the top of the sky at all, but down, *down* at the bottom of the sea . . . trapped in this steel bubble, while the dark poured in.

The pain in his head was gone, as if it had never been there, and he understood what that meant: Up there, the great body was hanging like butcher's carrion in the darkness. Its death struggles were over, the damage done.

Wesson gathered a desperate breath, shouted, "Help me! The alien's dead! He kicked the Station apart—the methane's coming in! Get help, do you hear me? *Do you hear me?*"

Silence. In the smothering blackness, he remembered: *She can't understand me any more. Even if she's alive.*

He turned, making an animal noise in his throat. He groped his way on around the room, past the second doorway. Behind the walls, something was dripping with a slow cold tinkle and splash, a forlorn night sound. Small, hard floating things rapped against his legs. Then he touched a smooth curve of metal: the airlock.

Eagerly he pushed his feeble weight against the door. It didn't move. And it didn't move. Cold air was rushing out around the door frame, a thin knife-cold stream, but the door itself was jammed tight.

The suit! He should have thought of that before. If he just had some pure air to breathe, and a little warmth in his fingers . . . But the door of the suit locker would not move, either. The ceiling must have buckled.

And that was the end, he thought, bewildered. There were no more ways out. But there *had* to be— He pounded on the door until his arms would not lift any more; it did not move. Leaning against the chill metal, he saw a single light blink on overhead.

The room was a wild place of black shadows and swimming shapes—the book leaves, fluttering and darting in the air stream. Schools of them beat wildly at the walls, curling over, baffled, trying again; others were swooping around the outer corridor, around and around: he could see them whirling past the doorways, dreamlike, a white drift of silent paper in the darkness.

The acrid smell was harsher in his nostrils. Wesson choked, groping his way to the console again. He pounded it with his open hand: he wanted to see Earth.

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But when the little square of brightness leaped up, it was the dead body of the alien that Wesson saw.

It hung motionless in the cavity of the Station, limbs dangling stiff and still, eyes dull. The last turn of the screw had been too much for it: but Wesson had survived . . .

For a few minutes.

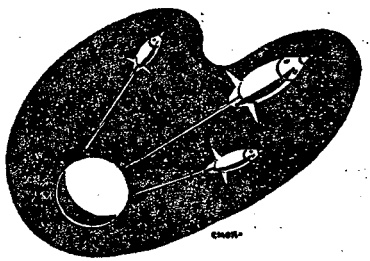
The dead alien face mocked him; a whisper of memory floated into his mind: *We might have been brothers.* . . . All at once, Wesson passionately wanted to believe it—wanted to give in, turn back. That passed. Wearily he let himself sag into the bitter *now,* thinking with thin defiance, *It's done—hate wins. You'll have to stop this big give-away—can't risk this happening again. And we'll hate you for that—and when we get out to the stars—*

The world was swimming numbly away out of reach. He felt the last fit of coughing take his body, as if it were happening to someone else beside him.

The last fluttering leaves of paper came to rest. There was a long silence in the drowned room.

Then:

"Paul," said the voice of the mechanical woman brokenly; "Paul," it said again, with the hopelessness of lost, unknown, impossible love.



STATEMENT REQUIRED BY THE ACT OF AUGUST 24, 1912, AS AMENDED BY THE ACTS OF MARCH 3, 1933, AND JULY 2, 1946 (Title 39, United States Code, Section 233)
SHOWING THE OWNERSHIP, MANAGEMENT, AND CIRCULATION
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1. The names and addresses of the publisher, editor, managing editor, and business managers are: *Publisher*, Joseph W. Ferman, 527 Madison Avenue, New York 22, N. Y.; *Editor*, Anthony Boucher, 2643 Dana Street, Berkeley 4, Calif.; *Managing Editor*, Robert P. Mills, 527 Madison Avenue, New York 22, N. Y. 2. The owners are: Fantasy House, Inc., 527 Madison Avenue, New York 22, N. Y.; Joseph W. Ferman, 527 Madison Avenue, New York 22, N. Y. 3. The known bondholders, mortgagees, and other security holders owning or holding 1 percent or more of total amount of bonds, mortgages, or other securities are: None. 4. Paragraphs 2 and 3 include, in cases where the stockholder or security holder appears upon the books of the company as trustee or in any other fiduciary relation, the name of the person or corporation for whom such trustee is acting; also the statements in the two paragraphs show the affiant's full knowledge and belief as to the circumstances and conditions under which stockholders and security holders who do not appear upon the books of the company as trustees, hold stock and securities in a capacity other than that of a bona fide owner. (Signed) Joseph W. Ferman, *Publisher*. Sworn to and subscribed before me this 12th day of September, 1956. (Seal) Melvin Flamm. (My commission expires March 30, 1957.)

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It's one of F&SF's happiest boasts that, to date, every published story by Mildred Clingerman has appeared in these pages . . . but (fortunately for Mrs. Clingerman) not always for the first time. P. Schuyler Miller recently referred to her Birds Can't Count (THE BEST FROM F&SF: FIFTH SERIES) *as "the kind of smoothly told little tale that should be earning its author really big checks in the really big weeklies, and probably will." Mr. Miller extrapolates accurately; the really big checks have been coming Our Mildred's way lately, for smoothly told but not always "little" tales. This story from* Collier's, *for instance, is deceptively small-scale in the size of its cast and the scope of its incidents, but far from little in what it suggests concerning the nature of love and faith.*

First Lesson

by MILDRED CLINGERMAN

THE HOUSE WAS VERY UGLY—ONE of those narrow three-story Queen Anne houses with scalloped siding and a turret. Back in the nineties some other woman, perhaps, had occupied the turret bedroom and considered it romantic. Sometimes in the late afternoons I'd lean my arms on the windowsill and stare down through the green leaves of the tulip tree, watching for Hugh to turn into this quiet street, and I'd remember that tower rooms were the traditional vantage points for wives of soldiering husbands. There were half a dozen other wives waiting in that house for their men, but I knew that none of them waited with my peculiar fear.

As a matter of fact, Hugh and I felt ourselves very fortunate to be in that house. Hugh was neither an officer nor an officer candidate, and the landladies in that town upheld army tradition by almost never mixing enlisted men with the officer caste. But our landlady had a streak of romance and rebellion. She also had a soft spot for the enlisted paratroopers, who seemed to represent for her the essence of the crazy wildness Southern women find so attractive in men. Moreover, I was able to fall into Southern speech at will. I had only to remember the tones of my grandmother's voice, and my tongue obligingly produced the sounds that made my landlady

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happy; my voice grew higher and draggingly sweet, and the rhythm of the words changed subtly. One used almost any weapon to acquire a room in those days, in that town. Mrs. Allen, our landlady, had grown very fond of me almost immediately.

The officers' wives were not in the least fond of me. We smiled coolly at each other when we passed on the stairway. They were punctilious about allowing me my turn in the bathroom, but the only conversation I'd ever had with any of them was once when the tall dark one ran out of cigarettes and borrowed a pack from me. She was in a great hurry to get back to her room and only paused long enough to tell me that the turret room was charming, really charming. Her enthusiasm alarmed me. I was afraid she wanted it for friends and might influence Mrs. Allen to make us move. But then I recalled Tall Dark's New Jersey accent and knew how unlikely it was that Mrs. Allen would ever be swayed by crisp consonants.

I ought to have been very lonely, I suppose. I was homesick for mountains and desert and distance, and I was often sickened by that hate and fear, so palpable in the South it oppressed one's breathing at times, but I wasn't lonely. Unless there was a night jump scheduled, Hugh came swinging down the street every afternoon, having been deposited at the corner by the bus labelled JORDAN, which one must always remember to pronounce *Jurdan*. Later the two of us would sally forth for the evening meal, since the turret room had no cooking facilities. So, except for the recurring dream that tortured me most nights, the evenings were good. I never told Hugh about the dream, and when I cried out in my sleep, he woke me with sleepy little kisses, murmuring all our familiar love words till I slept again. I roused briefly when his alarm clock rang at four A.M. and lay blinking at the brightness of the overhead light while Hugh dressed, listening to the heavy sighing with which Hugh greeted another day of soldiering. Watching his meticulous lacing of the paratrooper boots had such a hypnotic effect on me that generally I fell asleep again and never even heard his departure.

Mrs. Allen gave me coffee in the late mornings. She kept her coffeepot full all day, and I was free to help myself. Several times a day she stood at the foot of the stairway and summoned me with her fluty, penetrating voice to come have a "dope" with her. Bottled cola drinks in the South were so strong they made me feel as if my scalp were floating, and I rarely managed to down more than one a day, while Mrs. Allen easily disposed of six or eight.

When Mrs. Allen wasn't drinking coffee or cola, which she drank

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always standing up, staring exhaustedly at the kitchen sink, she was following the colored maid around, exhorting and pleading in a sweetly despairing voice audible all over the house. Iris was a sullen-faced young woman who never swept the corners of rooms, but plied her broom in aimless circles while she gazed inscrutably at the cobwebs hanging from the high ceilings. One often met Iris carrying a mop bucket full of cold, greasy black water and dragging a string mop that resembled a tumbled heap of dark worms, some of which detached themselves to lie coiled in waiting all along the hall. Sometimes there was an ominous silence between the two women that kept me confined to my room, despite my longing for coffee. There were days, I knew, when the widowed Mrs. Allen woke up "suffering" and dosed herself liberally with bourbon. The kitchen wasn't a pleasant spot on such mornings. But after a few hours I'd hear Iris and Mrs. Allen laughing together—shrieking, rather—their laughter so much alike I couldn't distinguish one voice from the other. I'd go down then and have my coffee before I dressed to leave the house for a late luncheon.

I was one of an army of wives that invaded the streets at that hour. Most of them walked in pairs like schoolgirls, eating together, shopping together, sharing little private jokes, and occasionally quarreling with the bitter intensity of bored women. I came to recognize many of these couples, and we all smiled and nodded, but I had no desire to join them or to link myself with any of the other unattached women who made tentative efforts to form an alliance. My reluctance was, I suppose, a kind of snobbery, but it was also an effort to maintain some semblance of my normal, civilian life which had never depended on just that type of feminine companionship.

I explored the town on foot and by bus. I spent hours in the library, and once I rented a light airplane and flew myself high over the town for an hour and a half of blissful solitude, till the mist from the river cut down on the visibility. It looked a very clean, orderly world from up there, but I knew better. The war was going badly for us at that time, and any day now Hugh's group would be shipped out. In the meantime they were practicing night jumping with full equipment, and with this step-up in the training program my nightmare dream became more insistent, more detailed.

I became less and less able each morning to shake off the horror of the dream. Mrs. Allen began to chide me for looking so poorly. Even Iris, who had ignored me for the most part, began to cluck a soft, wordless counterpoint to

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Mrs. Allen's mournful inventory of all that was wrong with my appearance. I was much too pale, they assured me; my eyes looked like two burnt holes in a blanket, and I'd better get myself to a doctor before my bones started poking out of my skin. Iris followed me back to my room one day carrying the mop bucket and the squirming mop, with the avowed intention of doing up my room for me. At her insistence I retreated to the bed while she smeared the middle of the worn linoleum with the liquid that resembled swampwater. Her eyes flashed with something like friendliness when I offered her a cigarette and asked her to sit down a minute and talk to me. She dropped into the straight chair, as far away from me as she could get in that small room. For a while we simply smoked, avoiding each other's eyes, both of us overcome by acute embarrassment.

Finally Iris said, "You 'bout worried sick?"

I shook my head. "I keep having the same dream," I said. "It's so real—I can't forget it in the daytime. It haunts me. I know it's silly to let it bother me so much . . ." My voice trailed off, and I tried to find something in the room to look at, because Iris' eyes were unreadable.

"Is it a real bad dream?"

"Horrible," I said. We stared earnestly at each other then for a long moment, and something stirred between the black woman and me—a tenuous thread of communication that seemed to dispel all the barriers we'd each put up. I forgot that I was not superstitious, and I realized I was asking for help. I can't be sure, but I think Iris forgot for an instant that I was white and too know-it-all to be deserving of help. In any case her response came almost automatically, as if she were unable to stop herself.

"Tell Iris. . . ."

I drew a deep breath and told her. I told her about the inky night sky and the droning airplane and the tense men lined up in the aisle of the plane, waiting for the signal light that would tell them they were over their drop area. I told her about Hugh, standing in the open door, just behind the lieutenant who was to lead off the jump. I saw the first man whisked out the door with Hugh right behind him. I saw their grimacing faces when the opening shock hit them —somewhat comparable, I told Iris, to hitting a padded brick wall at 85 miles an hour. But this was all right, this was normal. It always happened when they hit the end of the static line and the chutes opened. I told her about the expanse of white silk that billowed over Hugh's head for a moment, before it partially collapsed; of how he shook the lines, his head strained back, his voice cursing in the sudden silence; of how, finally,

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the chute blossomed out again, but with two panels blown. Beside him and above him men called to each other—some laughing with the relief from tension. One man, far off in the windy darkness, was talking coaxingly to his parachute, "Come on, baby, baby . . . sweet baby."

Suddenly a voice warned, strident and angry, "Slip to the right! Hot damn, they've dropped us over the trees. . . ." Hugh reacted instantly, tugging at his lines. He began to oscillate. He seemed to be dropping faster, swinging in a great arc. Never mind. Get set for the landing fall, knees slightly bent and together, shoulders hunched for the rolling tumble, head down, chin in. Was that the ground? Don't tense. . . . He never saw the jagged, heavy fence post. His back was turned to it, and he could not know that it was slanted toward him waiting like a giant fork. Only the watcher in the dream saw the fork spear the man through the back and emerge, glistening and sticky, through his torn chest. There wasn't any outcry from the man at all. It was the dreamer who cried out in horror and grief. The man hung there, impaled, while the uncollapsed chute danced angrily where it touched the meadow, tugging unmercifully at the dead man and the fence post. . . .

Iris shuddered and opened her eyes. I found I'd been staring at one of the brass knobs at the foot of the bed, but I hadn't known I was looking at it. My eyes had been turned inward to the dreadful vision that was becoming more real than anything else in my life. It was queer how the dream gathered details to itself as time went by. At first I'd seen only the body on the fence post. I hadn't known it was Hugh. Little by little the dream had developed backward from that moment, till now it was as if I were accompanying Hugh in the airplane, jumping beside him, watching and listening, hovering near him in helplessness.

There was something else about the dream that frightened me. Hugh rarely spoke of his job to me. Was it possible for me to have gathered so much knowledge about his jumps from the little he'd said? Perhaps. After all, I'd done a little night-flying; I'd even worn a parachute when I practiced spins, but I'd never been inside a plane of the type the troopers rode in. I'd never jumped out of an airplane in my life and hoped I never should. Still . . . it was just barely possible that I might imagine how it was. I think it was this daytime reasoning that had kept me free, for a long while, of the suffocating panic I now experienced.

Iris brought me a cigarette and lighted it with shaky hands.

"What . . . what do you think, Iris?" I asked.

"It sound bad to me," Iris said. "You tried prayin'?"

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I shook my head. "I . . . the truth is, Iris, I don't know how."

Iris looked at me in surprise. "Ain't you got faith?"

"I guess not. . . ." I turned away from Iris' eyes. They had the scatty look that said I was a strange breed of cat.

"Don't you believe in nothin'?" I could tell by her voice that Iris was not so much censuring me as indulging her curiosity.

"A few things . . . maybe. Bad things, mostly, I guess. Obviously I'm beginning to believe in this rotten dream."

"Yeah," Iris said, and it was comment enough.

"You got any ideas?" Iris asked, after a long silence.

"None," I said. "I can't very well go to Hugh's commanding officer and ask him please not to make Hugh jump any more, because I've had a bad dream."

"No," Iris acknowledged. "You reckon your man could play sick?"

"He wouldn't do it. Anyway, I've never told him—I won't tell him—about the dream."

"You did right there," Iris said. "It would only fret him. . . . When he gonna jump again?"

"I don't know. In a few days, I guess. He'll tell me beforehand."

"Well, now, listen," Iris said. "They *is* something you can do." She looked at me measuringly. "You got twenty dollars? That's what it costs—twenty dollars. And you gotta do just like I say. You just give me the money, heah? I'll fix it all up so's you don't need to worry. Now, listen. . . ."

I listened with a kind of numbed distaste to the instructions Iris gave me. When she finished I protested that I could never, never believe in such foolishness—or magic, whatever she wanted to call it.

"You don't have to believe," Iris said. "They's others will do the believin'. You just pays the money. And anybody could do the rest of it—them two little bitty things I told you. Lordy! Ain't you willin' to spend any amount to save your man?"

I got up and found my purse and gave Iris a twenty-dollar bill. I didn't believe for a minute that she could help me, any more than she'd helped me already, simply by listening to me.

"I gotta go," Iris said. "Remember, tomorrow, you listen for the strawberry man." She stood in the open doorway with the mop and pail. Just before she closed the door, she spoke again, her voice sly and amused. "Don't be surprised none if you start believin' in it yourself. Most folks *does* believe in the power of a twenty-dollar bill."

The next morning I got up and dressed much earlier than usual. When I went down to the kitchen, it was empty, but I heard Iris and Mrs. Allen in the front part of the house. I didn't want to see Iris that day, so I drank my coffee hurriedly

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and sped back to my room to wait for the Negro peddlers whose distinctive calls would soon sound in the quiet street.

The first one to appear pushed a barrow filled with fresh black-eyed peas. "BACK! Ah, peace . . ." the man called, with a poignant, sorrowful cry. He got a good response from the housewives or their maids. I leaned on my windowsill to watch. After ten minutes or so of silence, the street was filled with the cry of the strawberry man. "Star bees? RIPE star bees . . ." It was a charming, plaintive question and answer. Often when I'd been lying half-awake listening to it, I'd tried to imagine just what a star bee looked like, tempted to empty my purse for a swarm of them. This morning, though, the call meant something else to me, something dark and alien and faintly disgusting. Whatever it was I was buying from the man, I was certain it wasn't anything so nice as star bees.

He had rested his barrow directly beneath my window, and stood there as if waiting for my appearance. I called down to him and gestured stiffly when he looked up at me. On my way down to him I was glad not to meet anyone on the stairs. The house seemed suddenly deserted.

The strawberry man, I saw, was very old. He pulled a long, wrinkled earlobe by way of greeting me. From an inside pocket of his torn old coat he produced a small gray envelope and handed it to me.

"Iris sent me," I said unnecessarily, since I already held the envelope.

He nodded and seemed to look far beyond me. "You f'm Arizony?"

"Yes," I said. "Have you been there?"

"Cowboys," the old man murmured. "And Indians . . ." He nodded positively at me as if to assure me that the world held endless riches. Then the old, yellowed eyes filled with tears and his pendulous lower lip trembled. "Some *say* . . ." He looked a thousand questions at me, as if doubt tormented him.

"Oh, it's *true,*" I answered, and his face lighted with delight. I turned away then, because I didn't want the strawberry man to see in my eyes that the cowboys and Indians I knew were not in the least like the godlike creatures he dreamed of, that the mythical men he revered were exactly as numerous as star bees, and truth more elusive than either.

Back in my room I opened the small envelope and examined its contents—three pieces of white rice paper, scrawled all over with red ink. I recognized the paper as leaves from a book of cigarette papers. I couldn't make anything of the scrawled writing. If there were words written on the papers,

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they were in no language I had ever seen. Some of the words seemed to flow into minute, scratched pictures, one of which may have been a rooster, another a goat. But, according to Iris' reiterated instructions, it wasn't a part of my task to decipher the markings. My task was much simpler; I had only to chew up the papers and swallow them.

"You've gone this far," I told myself. "Why balk now?" The papers went down more easily than I had expected. The next part was even simpler. I fished two pennies out of my change purse and slipped them into the envelope.

I left Mrs. Allen's house then and took a bus to town. From the bus terminal I walked eight blocks to the river. From the pedestrian's walk on the bridge I threw the envelope with its pennies into the muddy water. Afterwards I ate a good lunch and went to a movie, and I felt strangely quiet and peaceful.

I had scarcely returned to my turret room when Mrs. Allen called me to the telephone in the downstairs hallway.

"It's Hugh," Mrs. Allen told me. "I expect he's going to be delayed this evening."

"Sorry, darling," Hugh said. "I'll be late tonight. They've scheduled another jump. You'd better go have your dinner without me. I'm not sure just what time I'll get back. They've got a whole mob of us stacked up here at Malfunction Junction."

Malfunction Junction was the paratroopers' wry name for the airport.

It was a long evening. I wasn't hungry enough to go out to eat. I drank coffee with Mrs. Allen and ate a candy bar I found in our room. I tried to read, but I was unable to bring to my reading the same quality of attention I usually devoted to it on the nights Hugh jumped. But that fact was, in a way, a relief. I hated ever to use reading as one uses a drug. I sat in my room and tried to decide if I was as fearful as I had been over past jumps. Yes, but with a difference. What was it? For one thing, I was able to sit still without the anchor of a book. For another, I had made some kind of contact with the future, with tomorrow, by my imitation of an act of faith. Unable to believe for myself, I was yet able to believe that somebody, somewhere (more primitive, more gullible) was believing in my stead. As I say, it was a very long evening, and I had plenty of time for thinking—thinking with a difference.

At ten o'clock when the tall, dark girl from New Jersey knocked on my door, I was able to answer without any show of fear. How many times I'd waited for Hugh, terrified that somebody would come knocking to tell me he was dead.

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Seeing my light, she said, she'd come to borrow cigarettes again. She was appealingly shamefaced about it, remembering that she'd never paid back the first package. It took me a few moments to realize that she hadn't really come for that reason. After I'd shared my cigarettes with her and invited her to sit down, she admitted she'd met Mrs. Allen hovering in the hallway, and that Mrs. Allen had asked her to step in and keep me company for a little while.

"My husband's away this evening, too," the girl said. "Isn't this a dull hole to be stationed in?"

We talked for an hour and then parted with shy friendliness.

At midnight I was still sitting in the lumpy old wing chair, numbly waiting for the sound of Hugh's boots on the stairway. At two A.M. when he opened the door, I knew at once that something disastrous had happened. Hugh was very pale. I remember thinking that he looked exactly as if somebody had dusted his face with flour. He came to me at once and put his head against mine. His hands gripped my shoulders so hard I wanted to protest, but I didn't. I began to cry very quietly, and for long minutes neither of us said a word.

Finally Hugh said, "Three of them drifted into the river. All drowned. Lots of them landed in the trees, but none seriously injured. Two malfunctions . . . one man with a streamer hit the ground, still flipping at his lines. We yelled at him to pull the chest pack. It was as if he couldn't hear us. . . . Was it windy here? Very windy over there across the river. . . . I came down by a fence. You know those barbed wire fences they have out in the country here? Like military entanglements, almost. There was a jagged post . . . Somebody yelled at me. My God, baby, it was close. . . . What startled me—everybody, you know, was yelling tonight—it sounded like you. Whoever it was, some real young kid, I guess, he called me by my first name. He saved my life. It was a loused-up jump from the word go. The pilot must have seen what he thought was the ground signal—probably some farmer's lantern—and he thought he was over our drop area. It took hours to find everybody. Darling, darling, don't cry. . . ."

Slowly Hugh relaxed enough to begin undressing for bed. He talked softly, monotonously, though, all the time he was unlacing his boots. "Look, here and here, at the riser burns on my neck. . . . And my helmet fell down over my face—separated from the helmet liner. Took me forever, it seemed, to shove it back so I could see anything. The opening shock was bad tonight. I blew two panels. Shook one old boy right out of his boots. . . ."

Hugh pulled off one of his own

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boots, and a penny rolled out. He stared at it in disbelief, then slowly pulled off the other boot and shook it. Another penny rolled across the floor.

"Now what stupid idiot did that?" Hugh was shaking with anger. "Anybody knows it's dangerous as hell to do silly, superstitious things like that—those damn pennies could have buried themselves in my feet if they'd got turned sideways."

That was the last jump Hugh made in the States. A week later he was shipped out for Europe. I should have been very happy if I'd known when I said goodby to him that I'd see him again in two years, that he would be the same Hugh, a little quieter and older, but otherwise untouched.

I gave up the turret room to friends of the tall, dark girl from New Jersey. I told Mrs. Allen and Iris goodby and went home to the desert to work and wait. Mrs. Allen sent me a Christmas card that year and enclosed a note from Iris. It read:

They is a kindygarten for faith, too. You just swallows the good words and casts your bread on the waters. That was all I meant to teach you. All that fancy stuff was just plumb foolishness, like you said. The strawberry man is my daddy. It was me drawed the pictures with red ink. It was me and my daddy that prayed. Excuse me, but your letter don't make any sense to me. I never put no pennies in your mister's boots. How could I? I thought they went in the river? Please answer, because them pennies are fretting me. Best wishes from Iris.

Full Circle

Imagine ourselves imagined: who thought us up? The one
Who could suppose a race of such supposers
Would have to be Imagination plus,
Extrapolating variables in variables,
Till we imagine Him as He did us.

—DOROTHY COWLES PINKNEY

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THE DOOR INTO SUMMER: synopsis

My old man named me DANIEL BOONE DAVIS *and taught me to prize personal freedom. In November 1970 I was on top of the world — president, chief engineer, and controlling stockholder of* HIRED GIRL, INC., *the household automation firm; I was engaged to my beautiful secretary* BELLE DARKIN; *my partner was my wartime buddy* MILES GENTRY, *lawyer and business manager of Hired Girl. Our first two household robot servants, Hired Girl and Window Willie, were making us money and I had just finished the prototype of Flexible Frank, the household automaton who could do anything.*

On December 3, 1970 I was a sorry mess. All that I had left was some dirty old money, a cumulative hangover, and one battle-scarred tomcat, Petronius the Arbiter, called PETE. *My friend and my sweetheart had ganged up on me to kick me out of my business, steal from me my new invention, and tie me up with a faked yellow-dog contract to keep me from competing with them. I had quarreled with Miles over expanding the business (I was against it) and with Belle over Pete (she despised cats); they had used stock that I had assigned to Belle as an engagement present plus the circumstance that they handled all the firm's paperwork to rig things to hogtie me professionally and lock me out of Hired Girl, Inc. But they were too smart to bankrupt me; I got "severance pay" and a "bonus" and they let me keep a minority holding of stock — it would be impossible to prove in court that I had been cheated.*

My cat Pete used to look for "the door into summer," being convinced that if he made me open all the doors, at least one of them must open into good weather. Now I was looking for the door into summer . . . and I had decided that it must lie in cold-sleep.

1970 was the year that the insurance companies really started booming the idea of suspended animation — "Work While You Sleep" — and let your money accumulate . . . wake up a generation later, rich and still young.

I arranged cold-sleep for both Pete and me with the Mutual Assurance Company — I wanted to wake up still young and go count the wrinkles on Belle's haggard face. But the insurance company's examining physician gave me some shot that sobered me up; I decided to go out and have a showdown with Miles first; I phoned him, climbed in my car, and headed for his house.

But I decided first to safeguard my remaining shares of Hired Girl stock . . . not easy; I had no place to send them, no one whom I trusted. Then I thought of RICKY. *Frederica Virginia Gentry was Miles's eleven-year-old stepdaughter; Ricky was as close to Pete as I was and the one person left in*

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the world whom I could trust. By good luck, Ricky was not with Miles; she was at Girl Scout camp; I decided to stop on the way to Miles's house and mail the stock certificates to Ricky. Then I elaborated the plan: I would mail her the stock certificates in an enclosed sealed envelope and include an assignment which would cause the Bank of America to hold the stock in trust for her until she was of age. With this sealed envelope I put a note to Ricky telling her that if she did not hear from me for a year, then she was to take the sealed envelope to any branch of the bank and tell them to open it. All this monkey business was intended to insure that Ricky would get my holdings and that her stepfather and Belle would not *. . . in case something violent and final happened to me. I mailed it and went on to see Miles.*

Both Belle and Miles were there, as well as Pete, who declined to be left out in my car. The showdown was bitter as civil war and in the course of it I got onto the fact that Belle had married Miles even before they had swindled me. I goaded them with it — and Belle stabbed me in the back with a hypodermic. It was the "zombie" drug, the stuff developed for brainwashing; it left me conscious, able to see and hear, but totally without any will of my own.

While I was awake but helpless Belle tried to kill my cat. There followed a glorious battle; neither Belle nor Miles managed to hurt the cat but he clawed them to bloody ribbons, then escaped out the back door.

After they bandaged their wounds they disposed of me. I had had all my papers for commitment to cold-sleep with me; Belle worked them over to leave out the missing cat, to leave out reference to my Hired Girl stock (she was furious to find it missing), and to switch me over to the Master Insurance Company where she had connections and could handle the fact that I was being committed while doped to the eyebrows. Once her forgeries were all worked out they hurried me to Sawtelle Sanctuary and had me put into cold-sleep.

I woke up in the year 2000, healthy but flat broke; the insurance company Belle turned me over to failed to pay off. My first problem was eating money. As an engineer I was 30 years out of date but I got a job at common labor, junking brand-new price-support automobiles. Meanwhile I studied to try to get back into engineering, but the changes had been enormous — NullGrav, solid circuits, commercial gold, New Plan cities, automation everywhere — an engineer's paradise and I was eager as sin to catch up and design a few dozen things.

The two giants in my field were my old firm, Hired Girl, Inc., and a new one, Aladdin Autoengineering Corporation. Aladdin Corp interested me

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because it held the basic patents on Eager Beaver (which I was fairly certain was based on my own Flexible Frank) and on Drafting Dan, a semi-robot drafting machine which was very much like one which I had planned back in 1970 — but which could not possibly have been based on my idea as I had made neither notes nor sketches. I wanted to trace the history of each of these gadgets.

But I passed up Aladdin in favor of my old firm, having found out that neither Miles nor Belle was now connected with it. Hired Girl would not have its grandpappy as an engineer but they did hire me as a sort of glorified advertising model for a series of ads and promotions based around "the Founder of the Industry" (me) and let me putter as I wished in engineering.

These promotional pictures brought a call from "Mrs. Schultz" — it was Belle Darkin.

I had been unable to find Belle, or Miles, or Ricky. The first two I forgot, after trying the usual channels and making sure that they no longer controlled Hired Girl — it was 30 years in the past and revenge was foolish; the only thing I was bitter about was my cat Pete and it was much too late to help him, rest his little soul. But Ricky I was most anxious to find . . . my one link with the past and the only human being among billions who was still dear to me.

So I went to see Belle Darkin-Gentry-Schultz to try to pick up a lead to Ricky. The only thing I got out of her drug-and-alcohol-confused mind was that Ricky had been taken by her grandmother, whose last name probably began with an "H" and who once might or might not have lived in one of the desert towns of the Southwest. I had already determined that the stock I had once held had never been assigned to Frederica Gentry; this new faint lead was all I had to go on — and it would have to wait until I could afford large detective fees to try to trace her.

But the almost-hopeless search for Ricky was put out of my mind for the moment by the arrival of letters from the Patent Office: in response to my queries they had sent records on the basic patents of both Eager Beaver and Drafting Dan. Both basic patents were taken out in 1970, both by D. B. Davis. My head circled and came in for a crash landing . . . I was D. B. Davis.

Either I was crazy, or I had had amnesia . . . or some swindle even more colossal than the other had been pulled. One of these gadgets I had invented (as Flexible Frank) but the other I could not possibly have invented . . . and I had no recollection at all of ever having patented either one of them.

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My friend CHUCK FREUDENBERG, *the best engineer around Hired Girl, came to my rescue by pouring a number of beers into me and talking sense. He pointed out that D. B. Davis was a very ordinary name and urged me to quiet down and let him investigate. I was soothed somewhat but still mourned the fact that I could not go back 30 years and find out what had really happened . . . what had happened to Ricky, what had happened to my stock, the mystery underlying those two patents — everything.*

Chuck himself had had one beer too many; he let slip that he himself, under military security, had worked on a "time machine" — a real one, one that had worked. Then he sobered suddenly, swore me to secrecy, told me that it had been developed by the great physicist DR. HUBERT TWITCHELL *at the University of Colorado — but that I was to forget all about it as not only was it still held as top secret, it also had a very disconcerting flaw: there was no way at all to tell whether this time machine would throw you forward into the future . . . or back into the past.*

We staggered beerily home and I went to bed, first glancing through the week's stack of the Great Los Angeles Times *for the current cold-sleep withdrawals and commitments as listed in the vital statistics — a habit I now had through the faint hope of finding an old friend. Then I went to sleep.*

I woke up from a nightmare, convinced that Ricky's name had been somewhere in those lists. So I searched the papers again . . . and failed to find her — but I did find, among the week's withdrawals from Riverside Sanctuary the name "F. V. Heinicke" . . . and was convinced in my heart if not by logic that this was Frederica Virginia known as "Ricky." A phone call to the Sanctuary confirmed it . . . but Ricky had already checked out.

The trail was cold in Riverside but they showed me a picture of her — my Ricky, truly my darling Ricky, but now a woman, possibly twenty-one, in the first full flush of her beauty. I followed her to Brawley, California, found that she had lived there years before, with her grandmother, Mrs. Heinicke. I lost the trail, found that she had a man with her, was discouraged, but nevertheless followed them to Yuma. What I saw there on the county clerk's register shocked me so much that I dropped the search and caught a ship for Denver.

In Denver I bought commercial gold with every cent I could raise and went to Boulder. There I cuddled up to Dr. Twitchell under pretense of writing his biography. He was a tragic figure, frustrated, disappointed, grown almost senile; nevertheless it took me ten days to win his confidence to the point

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where he showed me his time laboratory . . . and flatly refused to demonstrate it. Then I did the most shameful thing of my life: I harried the poor old man like a picador . . . goading him, sneering, laughing at him. He had made the demonstration setup I had asked him to make, 31 years and three weeks on the dials with myself on the stage of the apparatus. But he declined to turn on the power, telling me that it was too dangerous.

So, God forgive me, I laughed at him, saying, "A hoax! Twitch, you're a pompous old faker, a stuffed shirt. Your report was never suppressed; they just filed it in the screwball file. They pass it around now and then, just for a laugh — not 'Top Secret,' just 'Top Nonsense.'"

That did it. His finger stabbed the button.

The Door into Summer

by ROBERT A. HEINLEIN

(*Conclusion*)

EVEN AS HE STABBED AT THE BUTTON I tried to shout at him not to do it. But it was too late; I was already falling. My last thought was an agonized one that I didn't want to go through with it. I had chucked away everything and tormented almost to death a poor old man who hadn't done me any harm—and I didn't even know which way I was going. Worse, I didn't know that I would get there.

Then I hit. I don't think I fell more than four feet but I had not been ready for it. I fell like a stick.

Then somebody was saying, "Where the devil did *you* come from?"

It was a man, about 40, baldheaded but well built and lean. He was standing facing me, with his fists on his hipbones. He looked competent and shrewd and his face was not unpleasant save that at the moment he seemed sore at me.

I sat up and found that I was sitting on granite gravel and pine needles. There was a woman standing by the man, a pleasant, pretty woman somewhat younger than he. She was looking at me wide-eyed but not speaking.

"Where am I?" I said foolishly.

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I could have said, "When am I?" but that would have sounded still more foolish and besides I didn't think of it. One look at them and I knew when I was *not*—I was sure it was not 1970. Nor was I still in 2001; in 2001 they kept that sort of thing for the beaches. So I must have gone the wrong way.

Because neither one of them wore anything but smooth coats of tan. Not even Sticktite. But they seemed to find it enough. Certainly they were not embarrassed by it.

"One thing at a time," he objected. "I asked you how you got here?" He glanced up. "Your parachute didn't stick in the trees did it? In any case, what are you doing here? This is posted private property; you're trespassing. And what are you doing in that Mardi Gras get up?"

I didn't see anything wrong with my clothes—especially in view of the way they were dressed. But I didn't answer. Other times, other customs—I could see that I was going to have trouble.

She put a hand on his arm. "Don't, John," she said gently. "I think he's hurt."

He looked at her, glanced back sharply at me. "Are you hurt?"

I tried to stand up, managed it. "I don't think so. A few bruises, maybe. Uh, what date is today?"

"Huh? Why, it's the first Sunday in May. The third of May, I think. Is that right, Jenny?"

"Yes, dear."

"Look," I said urgently, "I got an awful knock on the head. I'm confused. What's the date? The whole date?"

"What?"

I should have kept my mouth shut until I could pick it up off something, a calendar or a paper. But I had to know right then; I couldn't stand to wait. "What year?"

"Brother, you did get a lump. It's 1970." I saw him staring at my clothes again.

My relief was almost more than I could stand. I'd made it, I'd made it! I wasn't too late. "Thanks," I said. "Thanks an awful lot. You don't know." He still looked as if he wanted to call out the reserves, so I added nervously, "I'm subject to sudden attacks of amnesia. Once I lost, uh—five whole years."

"I should think that would be upsetting," he said slowly. "Do you feel well enough to answer my questions?"

"Don't badger him, dear," she said softly. "He looks like a nice person. I think he's just made a mistake."

"We'll see. Well?"

"I feel all right . . . now. But I was pretty confused for a minute there."

"OK. How did you get here? And why are you dressed that way?"

"To tell the truth, I'm not sure how I got here. And I certainly

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don't know where I am. These spells hit me suddenly. As for how I'm dressed . . . I guess you could call it personal eccentricity. Uh . . . like the way you're dressed. Or not dressed."

He glanced down at himself and grinned. "Oh, yes. I'm quite aware that the way my wife and I are dressed . . . or not dressed . . . would call for explanation under some circumstances. But we prefer to make trespassers do the explaining instead. You see, you don't belong here, dressed that way or any other, while we do—just as we are. These are the grounds of the Denver Sunshine Club."

John and Jenny Sutton were the sort of sophisticated, unshockable, friendly people who could invite an earthquake in for tea. John obviously was not satisfied with my fishy explanations and wanted to cross-examine me, but Jenny held him back. I stuck to my story about "dizzy spells" and said that the last I remembered was yesterday evening and that I had been in Denver, at the New Brown Palace. Finally he said, "Well, it's quite interesting, even exciting, and I suppose somebody who's going into Boulder can drop you there and you can get a bus back into Denver." He looked at me again. "But if I take you back to the club house, people are going to be mighty, mighty curious."

I looked down at myself. I had been made vaguely uneasy by the fact that I was dressed and they were not—I mean I felt like the one out of order, not they. "John . . . would it simplify things if I peeled off my clothes, too?" The prospect did not upset me; I had never been in one of the bareskin camps before, seeing no point in them. But Chuck and I had spent a couple of weekends at Santa Barbara and one at Laguna Beach —at a beach, skin makes sense and nothing else does.

He nodded. "It certainly would."

"Dear," said Jenny, "he could be our guest."

"Mmm . . . yes. My only love, you paddle your sweet self into the grounds. Mix around and manage to let it be known that we are expecting a guest from . . . where had it better be, Danny?"

"Uh, from California. Los Angeles. I actually am from there." I almost said "Great Los Angeles" and realized that I was going to have to guard my speech. *Movies* were no longer *grabbies*.

"From Los Angeles. That and 'Danny' is all that is necessary; we don't use last names, unless offered. So, honey, you spread the word, as if it were something everybody already knew. Then in about half an hour you have to meet us down by the gate. But come here instead. And fetch my overnight bag."

"Why the bag, dear?"

"To conceal that masquerade

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costume. It's pretty conspicuous, even for anyone who is as eccentric as Danny says he is."

I got up and went at once behind some bushes to undress, since I wouldn't have any excuse for locker-room modesty once Jenny Sutton left us. I had to do it; I couldn't peel down and reveal that I had $20,000 worth of gold, figured at the 1970 standard of $60 an ounce, wrapped around my waist. It did not take long, as I had made a belt out of the gold, instead of a girdle, the first time I had had trouble getting it off and on to bathe; I had double-looped it and wired it together in front.

When I had my clothes off, I wrapped the gold in them and tried to pretend that it all weighed only what clothes should. John Sutton glanced at the bundle but said nothing. He offered me a cigarette—he carried them strapped to his ankle. They were a brand I had never expected to see again.

I waved it, but it didn't light. Then I let him light it for me. "Now," he said quietly, "that we are alone, do you have anything you want to tell me? If I'm going to vouch for you to the club, I'm honor bound to be sure, at the very least, that you won't make trouble."

I took a puff. It felt raw in my throat. "John, I won't make any trouble. That's the last thing on earth that I want."

"Just 'dizzy spells' then?"

I thought about it. It was an impossible situation. The man had a right to know. But he certainly would not believe the truth . . . at least *I* would not have in his shoes. But it would be worse if he *did* believe me; it would kick up the very hoorah that I did not want. I suppose that if I had been a real, honest, legitimate time-traveler, engaged in scientific research, I would have sought publicity, brought along indisputable proof, and invited tests by scientists.

But I wasn't; I was a private and somewhat shady citizen, engaged in hanky-panky I didn't want to call attention to. I was simply looking for my "Door to Summer," as quietly as possible.

"John, you wouldn't believe it if I told you."

"Mmm . . . perhaps. Still, I saw a man fall out of empty sky . . . but he didn't hit hard enough to hurt him. He's wearing funny clothes. He doesn't seem to know where he is, or what day it is. Danny, I've read Charles Fort, the same as most people. I never expected to meet a case. But, having met one, I don't expect the explanation to be simple. So?"

—"John, something you said earlier—the way you phrased something—made me think you were a lawyer."

"Yes, I am. Why?"

"Can I make a privileged communication?"

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"Hmm . . . Are you asking me to accept you as a client?"

"If you want to put it that way, yes. I'm probably going to need advice."

"Shoot. Privileged."

"OK. I'm from the future. Time travel."

He didn't say anything for several moments. We were lying stretched out in the sun. I was doing it to keep warm; May in Colorado is sunshiny but brisk. John Sutton seemed used to it, and was simply lounging, chewing a pine needle.

"You're right," he answered. "I don't believe it. Let's stick to 'dizzy spells.'"

"I told you you wouldn't."

He sighed. "Let's say I don't want to. I don't want to believe in ghosts, either, or reincarnation, or any of this ESP magic. I like simple things, that I can understand. I think most people do. So my first advice to you is to keep it a privileged communication. Don't spread it around."

"That suits me."

He rolled over. "But I think it would be a good idea if we burned these clothes. I'll find you something to wear. Will they burn?"

"Uh, not very easily. They'll melt."

"Better put your shoes back on. We wear shoes, mostly, and those will get by. Anybody asks you questions about them, they're custom made. Health shoes."

"They are, both."

"OK." He started to unroll my clothes before I could stop him. "What the devil!"

It was too late, so I let him uncover it. "Danny," he said in a queer voice, "is this stuff what it appears to be?"

"What does it appear to be?"

"Gold."

"Yes."

"Where did you get it?"

"I bought it."

He felt it, tried the dead softness of the stuff, sensuous as putty, then hefted it. "Cripes! Danny . . . listen to me carefully. I'm going to ask you one question and be damned careful how you answer it. Because I've got no use for a client who lies to me. I dump him. And I won't be a party to a felony. Did you come by this stuff legally?"

"Yes."

"Maybe you haven't heard of the gold reserve act of 1968?"

"I have. I came by it legally. I intend to sell it to the Denver Mint, for dollars."

"Jeweler's license, maybe?"

"No. John, I told the simple truth, whether you believe me or not. Where I came from, I bought that over the counter, legal as breathing. Now I want to turn it in for dollars at the earliest possible moment. I know that it is against the law to keep it. What can they do to me if I lay it on the counter at the mint and tell them to weigh it?"

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"Nothing, in the long run . . . if you stick to your 'dizzy spells.' But they can surely make your life miserable in the meantime." He looked at it. "I think you had better kick a little dirt over it."

"Bury it?"

"You don't have to go that far. But if what you tell me is true, you found this stuff in the mountains. That's where prospectors usually find gold."

"Well . . . whatever you say. I don't mind some little white lies, since it is legitimately mine."

"But is it a lie? When did you first lay eyes on this gold? What was the earliest date when it was in your possession?"

I tried to think back. It was the same day I left Yuma, which was sometime in May, 2001. About two weeks ago . . .

Hunh!

"Put that way, John . . . the earliest date on which I saw that gold . . . was today, May 3, 1970."

He nodded. "So you found it in the mountains."

The Suttons were staying over until Monday morning, so I stayed over. The other club members were all friendly but remarkably unnosy about my personal affairs, less so than any group I've ever been in. I've learned since that this constitutes standard good manners in a skin club, but at the time it made them the most discreet and polite people I had ever met.

John and Jenny had their own cabin and I slept on a cot in the club house dormitory. It was darn chilly. The next morning John gave me a shirt and a pair of blue jeans. My own clothes were wrapped around the gold, in a bag, in the trunk of his car—which itself was a Jaguar Imperator, all I needed to tell me that he was no cheap shyster. But I had known that by his manner.

I stayed overnight with them and by Tuesday I had a little money. I never laid eyes on the gold again but in the course of the next few weeks John turned over to me its exact mint value as bullion minus the standard fees of licensed gold buyers. I know that he did not deal with the mint directly as he always turned over to me vouchers from gold buyers. He did not deduct for his own services and he never offered to tell me the details.

I did not care. Once I had cash again I got busy. That first Tuesday, May 5, 1970, Jenny drove me around and I rented a small loft in the old commercial district. I equipped it with a drafting table, a work bench, an army cot and darn little else; it already had 120, 440, gas, running water, and a toilet that stopped up easily. I didn't want any more and I had to watch every dime.

It was tedious and time-wasting to design by the old compass & T-square routine and I didn't have

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a minute to spare, so I built Drafting Dan before I rebuilt Flexible Frank. Only this time Flexible Frank became Protean Pete, the all-purpose automaton, so linked as to be able to do almost anything a man can do, provided its Thorsen tubes were properly instructed. I knew that Protean Pete would not stay that way; his descendants would evolve into a horde of specialized gadgets, but I wanted to make the claims as broad as possible.

Working models are not required for patents, merely drawings and descriptions. But I needed good models, models that would work perfectly and that anybody could demonstrate, because these models were going to have to sell themselves, show by their very practicality and by the evident economy designed into them for their eventual production engineering that they not only would work but would be a good investment—the patent office is stuffed with things that work but are worthless commercially.

The work went both fast and slow, fast because I knew exactly what I was doing, slow because I did not have a proper machine shop nor any help. Presently I grudgingly dipped into my precious cash to rent some machine tools, then things went better. I worked from breakfast to exhaustion, seven days a week, except for about one weekend a month with John and Jenny at the bare-bottom club near Boulder. By the first of September I had both models working properly and was ready to start on the drawings and descriptions. I designed and sent out for manufacture pretty speckle-lacquer cover plates for both of them and I had the external moving parts chrome-plated; these were the only jobs I farmed out and it hurt me to spend the money, but I felt that it was necessary. Oh, I had made extreme use of catalog-available standard components; I could not have built them otherwise, nor would they have been commercial when I got through. But I did not like to spend money on custom-made prettiness.

I did not have time to get around much, which was just as well. Once when I was out buying a servo motor I ran into a chap I had known in California. He spoke to me and I answered before I thought. "Hey, Dan! Danny Davis! Imagine bumping into you here. I thought you were in Mojave?"

I shook hands. "Just a quick business trip. I'm going back soon."

"I'm going back this afternoon. I'll phone Miles and tell him I saw you."

I looked worried and was. "Don't do that, please."

"Why not? Aren't you and Miles still buddy-buddy budding tycoons together?"

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"Well . . . look, Mort, Miles doesn't know I'm here. I'm supposed to be in Albuquerque, on business for the company. But I flew up here on the side, on strictly personal and private business. Get me? Nothing to do with the firm. And I don't care to discuss it with Miles."

He looked knowing. "Woman trouble?"

"Well . . . yes."

"She married?"

"You might say so."

He dug me in the ribs and winked. "I catch. Old Miles is pretty puritanical, isn't he? OK, I'll cover for you and someday you can cover for me. Is she any good?"

I'd like to cover you with a spade, I thought to myself, you fourth-rate frallup. Mort was the sort of no-good traveling salesman who spends more time trying to seduce waitresses than taking care of his customers—besides which the line he handled was as shoddy as he was, never up to its specs.

But I bought him a drink and treated him to fairy tales about the "married woman" I had invented, and listened while he boasted to me of no doubt equally fictitious exploits. Then I shook him.

On another occasion I tried to buy Dr. Twitchell a drink and failed.

I had seated myself beside him at the restaurant counter of a drugstore on Champa Street, then caught sight of his face in the mirror. My first impulse was to crawl under the counter and hide.

Then I caught hold of myself and realized that, out of all the persons living in 1970, he was the one I had least need to worry about. Nothing could go wrong because nothing had . . . I meant "nothing would." No— Then I quit trying to phrase it, realizing that if time travel ever became widespread, English grammar was going to have to add a whole new set of tenses to describe reflexive situations—conjugations that would make the French literary tenses and the Latin historical tenses look simple.

In any case, past or future or something else, Twitchell was not a worry to me now. I could relax.

I studied his face in the mirror, wondering if I had been misled by a chance resemblance. But I had not been. Twitchell did not have a general-issue face like mine; he had stern, self-assured, slightly arrogant and quite handsome features which would have looked at home on Zeus. I remembered that face only in ruins but there was no doubt—and I squirmed inside as I thought of the old man and how badly I had treated him. I wondered how I could make it up to him.

Twitchell caught sight of me eying him in the mirror and turned to me. "Something wrong?"

"No. Uh . . . you're Doctor

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Twitchell, aren't you? At the University?"

"Denver University, yes. Have we met?"

I had almost slipped, having forgotten that he taught at the city university in this year. Remembering in two directions is difficult. "No, Doctor, but I've heard you lecture. You might say I'm one of your fans."

His mouth twitched in a half smile but he did not rise to it. From that and other things I learned that he had not yet acquired a gnawing need for adulation; he was sure of himself at that age and needed only his own self-approval. "Are you sure you haven't got me mixed up with a movie star?"

"Oh, no! You're Doctor Hubert Twitchell . . . the great physicist."

His mouth twitched again. "Let's just say that I am a physicist. Or try to be."

We chatted for a while and I tried to hang onto him after he had finished his sandwich. I said it would be an honor if he would let me buy him a drink. He shook his head. "I hardly drink at all, and certainly never before dark. Thanks anyway. It's been nice meeting you. Drop into my lab someday, if you are ever around the campus."

I said I would.

But I did not make many slips in 1970 (second time around) because I understood it and, anyhow, most people who might have recognized me were in California. I resolved that if I did meet any more familiar faces I would give them the cold stare and the quick brush-off—take no chances.

But little things can cause you trouble, too. Like the time I got caught in a zipper simply because I had become used to the more convenient and much safer Stick-tite closures. A lot of little things like that I missed very much, after having learned in only six months to take them for granted. Shaving—I had to go back to *shaving!* Once I even caught a cold. That horrid ghost of the past resulted from forgetting that clothes could get soaked in rain. I wish that those precious esthetes who sneer at progress and prattle about the superior beauties of the past could have been with me—dishes that let food get chilled, shirts that had to be laundered, bathroom mirrors that steamed up when you needed them, runny noses, dirt underfoot and dirt in your lungs—I had become used to a better way of living and 1970 was a series of petty frustrations until I got the hang of it again.

But a dog gets used to his fleas and so did I. Denver in 1970 was a very quaint place with a fine old-fashioned flavor; I became very fond of it. It was nothing like the slick New Plan maze it had been (or would be) when I had arrived (or would arrive) there

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from Yuma; it still had less than two million people, there were still buses and other vehicular traffic in the streets—there still were *streets*; I had no trouble finding Colfax Avenue.

Denver was still getting used to being the national seat of government and was not quite happy in the role, like a boy in his first formal evening clothes. Its spirit still yearned for high-heeled boots and its western twang even though it knew it had to grow up and be an international metropolis, with embassies and spies and famous gourmet restaurants. The city was being jerry-built in all directions to house the bureaucrats and lobbyists and contact men and clerk-typists and flunkies; buildings were being thrown up so fast that with each one there was hazard of enclosing a cow inside the walls. Nevertheless the city had extended only a few miles past Aurora on the east, to Henderson on the north, and Littleton on the south—there was still open country before you reached the Air Academy. On the west, of course, the city flowed into the high country and the federal bureaus were tunneling back into the mountains.

I liked Denver during its Federal Boom. Nevertheless I was excruciatingly anxious to get back to my own time.

It was always the little things. I had had my teeth worked over completely shortly after I had been put on the staff of Hired Girl and could afford it. I had never expected to have to see a dental plastician again. Nevertheless, in 1970 I did not have anti-caries pills and so I got a hole in a tooth, a painful one or I would have ignored it. So I went to a dentist. So help me, I had forgotten what he would see when he looked into my mouth. He blinked, moved his mirror around, and said, "Great jumping Jehosaphat! Who was your dentist?"

"Kah hoo hank?"

He took his hands out of my mouth. "Who did it? And how?"

"Huh? You mean my teeth? Oh, that's experimental work they're doing in . . . India."

"How do they do it?"

"How would I know?"

"Mmm . . . wait a minute. I've got to get some pictures of this." He started fiddling with his X-ray equipment.

"Oh, no," I objected. "Just clean out that bicuspid, plug it up with anything, and let me out of here."

"But—"

"I'm sorry, Doctor. But I'm on a dead run."

So he did as I said, pausing now and again to look at my teeth. I paid cash and did not leave my name. I suppose I could have let him have the pics, but covering up had become a reflex. It couldn't have hurt anything to let him have them. Nor helped

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either, as X-rays would not show how regeneration was accomplished nor could I have told him.

There is no time like the past to get things done.

While I was sweating sixteen hours a day on Drafting Dan and Protean Pete, I got something else done with my left hand. Working anonymously through John's law office, I hired a detective agency with national branches to dig up Belle's past. I supplied them with her address and the license number and model of her car (since steering wheels are good places to get fingerprints) and suggested that she might have been married here and there and possibly might have a police record. I had to limit the budget severely; I couldn't afford the sort of investigation you read about.

When they did not report back in ten days I kissed my money goodby. But a few days later a thick envelope showed up at John's office.

Belle had been a busy girl. Born six years earlier than she claimed, she had been married twice before she was eighteen. One of them did not count, because the man already had a wife; if she had been divorced from the second the agency had not uncovered it.

She had apparently been married four times since then, although once was doubtful; it may have been the "war widow" racket worked with the aid of a man who was dead and could not object. She had been divorced once (respondent) and one of her husbands was dead. She might still be "married" to the others.

Her police record was long and interesting but apparently she had been convicted of a felony only once, in Nebraska, and granted parole without doing time. This was established only by fingerprints, as she had jumped parole, changed her name and acquired a new social security number. The agency asked if they were to notify Nebraska authorities.

I told them not to bother; she had been missing for nine years and her conviction had been for nothing worse than lure in a badger game. I wondered what I would have done if it had been dope peddling? Reflexive decisions have their complications.

I ran behind schedule on the drawings and October was on me before I knew it. I still had the descriptions only half worded, since they had to tie-in to drawings, and I had done nothing about the claims. Worse, I had done nothing about organizing the deal so that it would hold up; I could not do it until I had a completed job to show. Nor had I had time to make contacts. I began to think that I had made a mistake in not asking Dr. Twitchell to set the controls for at least 32 years instead of 31 years and a

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piddling three weeks; I had underestimated the time I would need and overestimated my own capacity.

I had not shown my toys to my friends the Suttons, not because I wanted to hide them but because I had not wanted a lot of talk and useless advice while they were incomplete. On the last Saturday in September I was scheduled to go out to the club camp with them. Being behind schedule I had worked late the night before, then had been awakened early by the torturing clang of an alarm clock so that I could shave and be ready to go when they came by. I shut the sadistic thing off and thanked God that they had got rid of such horrible devices in 2001, then I pulled myself groggily together and went down to the corner drugstore to phone and say that I couldn't make it, I had to work.

Jenny answered, "Danny, you're working too hard. A weekend in the country will do you good."

"I can't help it, Jenny. I have to. I'm sorry."

John got on the other phone and said, "What's all this nonsense?"

"I've got to work, John. I've simply got to. Say hello to the folks for me."

I went back upstairs, burned some toast, vulcanized some eggs, sat back down at Drafting Dan.

An hour later they banged on my door.

None of us went to the mountains that weekend. Instead I demonstrated both devices. Jenny was not much impressed by Drafting Dan (it isn't a woman's gismo, unless she herself is an engineer), but she was wide-eyed over Protean Pete. She kept house with a Mark Two Hired Girl and could see how much more this machine could do.

But John could see the importance of Drafting Dan. When I showed him how I could write my signature, recognizably my own, just by punching keys—I admit I had practiced—his eyebrows stayed up. "Chum, you're going to throw draftsmen out of work by the thousand."

"No, I won't. The shortage of engineering talent in this country gets worse every year; this gadget will just help to fill the gap. In a generation you are going to see this tool in every engineering and architectural office in the nation. They'll be as lost without it as a modern mechanic would be without power tools."

"You talk as if you knew."

"I do know."

He looked over at Protean Pete —I had set him to tidying my work bench—and back at Drafting Dan. "Danny . . . sometimes I think maybe you were telling me the truth, the day we met you."

I shrugged. "Call it second sight . . . but I do know. I'm certain. Does it matter?"

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"I guess not. What are your plans for these things?"

I frowned. "That's the hitch, John. I'm a good engineer, and a fair jack-leg mechanic when I have to be. But I'm no businessman; I've proved that. You've never fooled with patent law?"

"No. It's a job for a specialist."

"Do you know an honest one? Who's smart as a whip besides? It's reached the point where I've got to have one. I've got to set up a corporation, too, to handle it. And work out the financing. But I haven't got much time; I'm *terribly* pressed for time."

"Why?"

"I'm going back where I came from."

He sat and said nothing for quite a while. At last he said, "How much time?"

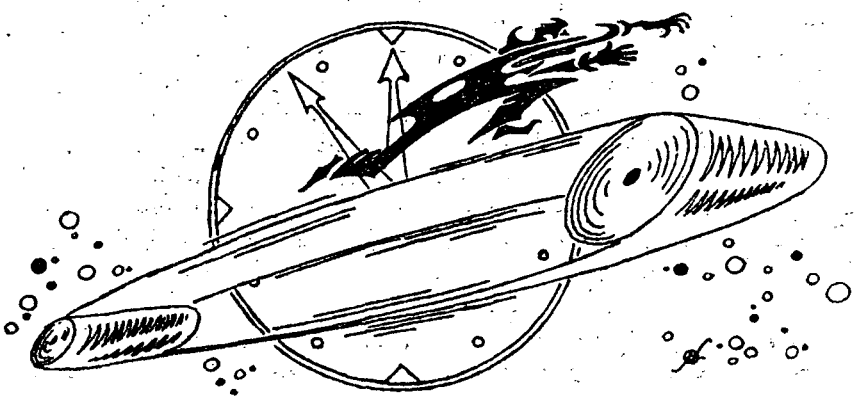
"Uh, about nine weeks. Nine weeks from Thursday to be exact."

He looked at the two machines, looked back at me. "Better revise your schedule. I'd say that you had more like nine months work cut out for you. You won't be in production even then—just lined up to start moving, with luck."

"John, I can't!"

"I'll say you can't."

"I mean I can't change my schedule. That's beyond my control . . . now." I put my face in my hands. I was dead with fatigue, having had less than five hours sleep and having averaged not much better for days. The shape I was in, I was willing to believe that there was something, after all, to this "fate" business—a man could struggle against it, but never beat it.



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I looked up. "Will *you* handle it?"

"Eh? What part of it?"

"Everything. I've done all I know how to do."

"That's a big order, Dan. I could rob you blind. You know that, don't you? And this may be a gold mine."

"It will be. I know."

"Then why trust me? You had better just keep me as your attorney, advice for a fee."

I tried to think, while my head ached. I had taken a partner once before—but, damnation, no matter how many times you get your fingers burned, you *have* to trust people. Otherwise you are a hermit in a cave, sleeping with one eye open. There wasn't any way to be safe; just being alive was deadly dangerous . . . fatal, in the end.

"Cripes, John, you know the answer to that. *You* trusted *me*. Now I need your help again. Will you help me?"

"Of course he will," Jenny put in gently, "though I haven't heard what you two were talking about. Danny? Can it wash dishes? Every dish you have is dirty."

"What, Jenny? Why, I suppose he can. Yes, of course he can."

"Then tell him to, please. I want to see it."

"Oh. I've never programed him for it. I will if you want me to. But it will take several hours to do it right. Of course, after that he'll always be able to do it. But the first time . . . well, you see, dishwashing involves a lot of alternate choices. It's a 'judgment' job, not a comparatively simple routine like laying bricks or driving a truck."

"Goodness! I'm certainly glad to find that at least one man understands housework. Did you hear what he said, dear? But don't stop to teach him now, Danny. I'll do them myself." She looked around. "Danny, you've been living like a pig, to put it gently."

To tell the simple truth, it had missed me entirely that Protean Pete could work for *me*. I had been engrossed in planning how he could work for other people, in commercial jobs, and teaching him to do them, while I myself had simply been sweeping dirt into the corner or ignoring it. Now I began teaching him all the household tasks that Flexible Frank had learned; he had the capacity, as I had installed three times as many Thorsen tubes in him as Frank had had.

I had time to do it, for John took over.

Jenny typed descriptions for us; John retained a patent attorney to help with the claims. I don't know whether John paid him cash or cut him in on the cake; I never asked. I left the whole thing up to him, including what our shares should be; not only did it leave me free for my proper work, but I figured that if he decided such things he

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could never be tempted the way Miles had been. And I honestly did not care; money as such is not important. Either John and Jenny were what I thought they were, or I might as well find that cave and be a hermit.

I insisted on just two things. "John, I think we ought to call the firm 'The Aladdin Autoengineering Corporation.'"

"Sounds pretty fancy. What's wrong with 'Davis & Sutton'?"

"That's how it's got to be, John."

"So? Is your second sight telling you this?"

"Could be, could be. We'll use a picture of Aladdin rubbing his lamp as a trade mark, with the genie forming above him. I'll make a rough sketch. And one other thing: the home office had better be in Los Angeles."

"What? Now you've gone too far. That is, if you expect me to run it. What's wrong with Denver?"

"Nothing is wrong with Denver, it's a nice town. But it is not the place to set up the factory. Pick a good site here and some bright morning you wake up and find that the Federal enclave has washed over it and you are out of business until you get reestablished on a new one. Besides that, labor is scarce, raw materials come overland, building materials are all gray market. Whereas Los Angeles has an unlimited supply of skilled workmen and more pouring in every day, Los Angeles is a sea port, Los Angeles is—"

"How about the smog? It's not worth it."

"They'll lick the smog before long. Believe me. And haven't you noticed that Denver is working up smog of its own?"

"Now wait a minute, Dan. You've already made it clear that I will have to run this while you go kiyoodling off on some business of your own. OK, I agreed. But I ought to have some choice in working conditions."

"It's necessary, John."

"Dan, nobody in his right mind who lives in Colorado would move to California. I was stationed out there during the War; I *know*. Take Jenny here; she's a native Californian, that's her secret shame. You couldn't hire her to go back. Here you've got winters, changing seasons, brisk mountain air, magnificent—"

Jenny looked up. "Oh, I wouldn't go so far as to say I'd *never* go back."

"What's that, dear?"

Jenny had been quietly knitting; she never talked unless she really had something to say. Now she put down her knitting, a clear sign. "If we did move there, dear, we could join the Oakdale club; they have outdoor swimming all year round. I was thinking of that just this last weekend, when I saw ice on the pool at Boulder."

I stayed until the evening of De-

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cember 2, 1970, the last possible minute. I was forced to borrow $3,000 from John—the prices I had paid for components had been scandalous—but I offered him a stock mortgage to secure it. He let me sign it, then tore it up and dropped it in a wastebasket. "Pay me when you get around to it."

"It will be thirty years, John."

"As long as that?"

I pondered it. He had never invited me to tell my whole story since the afternoon six months earlier when he had told me frankly that he did not believe the essential part—but was going to vouch for me to their club anyhow.

I told him I thought it was time to tell him. "Shall we wake up Jenny? She's entitled to hear it, too."

"Mmm . . . no. Let her nap until just before you have to leave. Jenny is a very uncomplicated person, Dan. She doesn't care who you are or where you came from, as long as she likes you. If it seems a good idea, I can pass it on to her later."

"As you will." He let me tell it all, stopping only to fill our glasses —mine with ginger ale; I had a reason not to touch alcohol. When I had brought it up to the point where I landed on a mountainside outside Boulder, I stopped. "That's it," I said. "Though I was mixed up on one point. I've looked at the contour since and I don't think my fall was more than two feet. If they had—I mean 'if they were going to'—bulldoze that laboratory site any deeper, I would have been buried alive. Probably would have killed both of you, too—if it didn't blow up the whole county. I don't know just what happens when a flat wave form changes back into a mass where another mass already is."

John went on smoking. "Well?" I said. "What do you think?"

"Danny, you've told me a lot of things about what Los Angeles—I mean 'Great Los Angeles'—is going to be like. I'll let you know when I see you just how accurate you've been."

"It's accurate. Subject to minor slips of memory."

"Mmm . . . you certainly make it sound logical. But in the meantime I think you are the most agreeable lunatic I've ever met. Not that it handicaps you as an engineer . . . or as a friend. I like you, boy. I'm going to buy you a new straitjacket for Christmas."

"Have it your own way."

"I *have* to have it this way. The alternative is that I myself am stark, staring mad . . . and that would make quite a problem for Jenny." He glanced at the clock. "We'd better wake her. She'd scalp me if I let you leave without saying goodby to her."

"I wouldn't think of it."

They drove me to Denver International Port and Jenny kissed

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me goodby at the gate. I caught the eleven o'clock shuttle for Los Angeles.

XI

The following evening, December 3, 1970, I had a cab driver drop me a block from Miles's house, comfortably early as I did not know exactly what time I had arrived there the first time. It was already dark as I approached his house but I saw only his car at the curb so I backed off a hundred yards to a spot where I could watch that stretch of curb, and waited.

Two cigarettes later I saw another car pull up there, stop, and its lights go out. I waited a couple of minutes longer, then hurried toward it. It was my own car.

I did not have a key but that was no hurdle; I was always getting ears-deep in an engineering problem and forgetting my keys; I had long ago formed the habit of keeping a spare ditched in the trunk. I got it now and climbed into the car. I had parked on a slight grade, heading downhill, so, without turning on lights or starting the engine, I let it drift to the corner and turned there, then switched on the engine but not the lights, and parked again in the alley back of Miles's house, on which his garage faced.

The garage was locked. I peered through dirty glass and saw a shape with a sheet over it. By its contours I knew it was my old friend Flexible Frank.

Garage doors are not built to resist a man armed with a tire iron and determination—not in Southern California in 1970. It took seconds. Carving Frank into pieces I could carry and stuff into my car took much longer. But first I checked to see that the notes and drawings were where I suspected they were—they were indeed, so I hauled them out and dumped them on the floor of the car, then tackled Frank himself. Nobody knew as well as I did how he was put together and it speeded up things enormously that I did not care how much damage I did; nevertheless I was as busy as a one-man band for nearly an hour.

I had just stowed the last piece, the wheelchair chassis, in the car trunk and had lowered the turtleback down on it as far as it would go, when I heard Pete start to wail. Swearing to myself at the time it had taken to tear Frank apart, I hurried around the garage and into their back yard. Then the commotion started.

I had promised myself that I would relish every second of Pete's triumph. But I couldn't see it. The back door was open and light was streaming out the screen door but, while I could hear sounds of running, crashes, Pete's blood-chilling war cry, and screams from Belle, they never accommodated me by

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coming into my theater of vision. So I crept up to the screen door, hoping to catch a glimpse of the carnage.

The damned thing was hooked! It was the only thing that had failed to follow the schedule. So I frantically dug into my pocket, broke a nail getting my knife open—and jabbed through and unhooked it just in time to jump out of the way as Pete hit the screen like a stunt motorcyclist hitting a fence.

I fell over a rosebush. I don't know whether Miles and Belle even tried to follow him outside. I doubt it; I would not have risked it, in their spot. But I was too busy getting myself untangled to notice.

Once I was on my feet I stayed behind bushes and moved around to the side of the house; I wanted to get away from that open door and the light pouring out of it. Then it was just a case of waiting until Pete quieted down. I would not touch him then, certainly not try to pick him up. I know cats.

But every time he passed me, prowling for an entrance and sounding his deep challenge, I called out to him, softly. "Pete. Come here, Pete. Easy, boy, it's all right."

He knew I was there and twice he looked at me, but otherwise ignored me. With cats it is one thing at a time; he had urgent business right now and no time to headbump with papa. But I knew he would come to me when his emotions had eased off.

While I squatted, waiting, I heard water running in their bathrooms and guessed that they had gone to clean up, leaving me in the living room. I had a horrid thought then: what would happen if I sneaked in and cut the throat of my own helpless body? But I suppressed it; I wasn't that curious and suicide is such a final experiment, even if the circumstances are mathematically intriguing.

But I never have figured it out.

Besides, I didn't want to go inside for any purpose. I might run into Miles—and I didn't want any truck with a dead man.

Pete finally stopped in front of me, about three feet out of reach. "Mrrrowrr?" he said—meaning "Let's go back and clean out the joint. You hit 'em high, I'll hit 'em low."

"No, boy. The show is over."

"Aw, c'mahnnn!"

"Time to go home, Pete. Come to Danny."

He sat down and started to wash himself. When he looked up, I put my arms out and he jumped into them. "Kwleert?" ("Where the hell were *you* when the riot started?")

I carried him back to the car and dumped him in the driver's space, which was all there was left. He sniffed the hardware on his accustomed place and looked around reproachfully. "You'll have to sit

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in my lap," I said. "Quit being fussy."

I switched on the car's lights as we hit the street. Then I turned east and headed for Big Bear and the Girl Scout Camp. I chucked away enough of Frank in the first ten minutes to permit Pete to resume his rightful place, which suited us both better. When I had the floor clear, several miles later, I stopped and shoved the notes and drawings down a storm drain. The wheelchair chassis I did not get rid of until we were actually in the mountains. Then it went down a deep arroyo, making a nice sound effect.

About three in the morning, I pulled into a motor court across the road and down a bit from the turn-off into the Girl Scout Camp, and paid too much for a cabin—Pete almost queered it by sticking his head up and making a comment when the owner came out.

"What time," I asked him, "does the morning mail from Los Angeles get up here?"

"Helicopter comes in at seven thirteen, right on the dot."

"Fine. Give me a call at seven, will you?"

"Mister, if you can sleep as late as seven around here, you're better than I am. But I'll put you in the book."

By eight o'clock Pete and I had eaten breakfast and I had showered and shaved. I looked Pete over in daylight and concluded that he had come through the battle undamaged except for possibly a bruise or two. We checked out and I drove into the private road for the camp. Uncle Sam's truck turned in just ahead of me; I decided that it was my day.

I never saw so many little girls in my life. They skittered like kittens and they all looked alike in their green uniforms. Those I passed wanted to look at Pete, though most of them just stared shyly and did not approach. I went to a cabin marked HEADQUARTERS where I spoke to another uniformed scout who was decidedly no longer a girl.

She was properly suspicious of me; strange men who want to be allowed to visit little girls just turning into big girls should always be suspected.

I explained that I was the child's uncle, Daniel B. Davis by name, and that I had a message for the child concerning her family. She countered with the statement that visitors other than parents were permitted only when accompanied by a parent and, in any case, visiting hours were not until four o'clock.

"I don't want to visit with Frederica, but I must give her this message. It's an emergency."

"In that case, you can write it out and I will give it to her as soon as she is through with rhythm games."

I looked upset (and was) and

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said, "I don't want to do that. It would be much kinder to tell the child, in person."

"Death in the family?"

"Not quite. Family trouble, yes. I'm sorry, ma'am, but I am not free to tell anyone else. It concerns my niece's mother."

She was weakening but still undecided. Then Pete joined the discussion. I had been carrying him, with his bottom in the crook of my left arm and his chest supported with my right hand; I had not wanted to leave him in the car and I knew Ricky would want to see him. He'll put up with being carried that way quite a while but now he was getting bored. "Krr-warr?"

She looked at him and said, "He's a fine boy, that one. I have a tabby at home who could have come from the same litter."

I said solemnly, "He's Frederica's cat. I had to bring him along, because . . . well, it was necessary. No one to take care of him."

"Oh, the poor little fellow!" She scratched him under the chin, doing it properly, thank goodness, and Pete accepted it, thank goodness again, stretching his neck and closing his eyes and looking indecently pleased. He is capable of taking a very stiff line with strangers if he does not fancy their overtures.

The guardian of youth told me to sit down at a table under the trees outside the headquarters. It was far enough away to permit a private visit but still under her careful eye. I thanked her and waited.

I didn't see Ricky come up. I heard a shout, "Uncle Danny!" and another one as I turned, "And you brought *Pete!* Oh, this is *wonderful!*"

Pete gave a long bubbling *bleerrrt* and leapt from my arms to hers. She caught him neatly, rearranged him in the support position he likes best, and they ignored me for a few seconds while exchanging cat protocols. Then she looked up and said soberly, "Uncle Danny, I'm awful glad you're here."

I didn't kiss her; I did not touch her at all. I've never been one to paw children and Ricky was the sort of little girl who only put up with it when she could not avoid it. Our original relationship, back when she was six, had been founded on mutual decent respect for the other's individualism and personal dignity.

But I did look at her. Knobby knees, stringy, shooting up fast, not yet filled out, she was not so pretty as she had been as a baby girl. The shorts and T-shirt she was wearing, combined with peeling sunburn, scratches, bruises, and an understandable amount of dirt, did not add up to feminine glamor. She was a matchstick sketch of the woman she would become, her coltish gawkiness relieved only by

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her enormous, solemn eyes and the pixie beauty of her thin, smudged features.

She looked adorable.

I said, "And I'm awful glad to be here, Ricky."

Trying awkwardly to manage Pete with one arm, she reached with her other hand for a bulging pocket in her shorts. "I'm surprised, too. I just this minute got a letter from you—they dragged me away from mail call; I haven't even had a chance to open it. Does it say that you're coming today?" She got it out, creased and mussed from being crammed into a pocket too small.

"No, it doesn't, Ricky. It says I'm going away. But after I mailed it, I decided I just had to come to say goodby in person."

She looked bleak and dropped her eyes. "You're going away?"

"Yes, I'll explain, Ricky, but it's rather long. Let's sit down and I'll tell you about it." So we sat on opposite sides of the picnic table under the ponderosas and I talked. Pete lay on the table between us, making a library lion of himself with his forepaws on the creased letter, and sang a low song like bees buzzing in deep clover, while he narrowed his eyes in contentment.

I was much relieved to find that she already knew that Miles had married Belle—I hadn't relished having to break that to her. She glanced up, dropped her eyes at once, and said with no expression at all, "Yes, I know. Daddy wrote me about it."

"Oh. I see."

She suddenly looked grim and not at all a child. "I'm not going back there, Danny. I *won't* go back there."

"But— Look here, Rikki-tikki-tavi, I know how you feel. I certainly don't want you to go back there—I'd take you away myself if I could. But how can you help going back? He's your Daddy and you are only eleven."

"I don't have to go back. He's not my real Daddy. My grandmother is coming to get me."

"What? When's she coming?"

"Tomorrow. She has to drive up from Brawley. I wrote her about it and asked her if I could come live with her, because I wouldn't live with Daddy any more with *her* there." She managed to put more contempt into one pronoun than an adult could have squeezed out of profanity. "Grandma wrote back and said that I didn't have to live there if I didn't want to, because he had never adopted me and she was my 'guardian of record.'" She looked up anxiously. "That's right, isn't it? They can't make me?"

I felt an overpowering flood of relief. The one thing I had not been able to figure out, a problem that had worried me for months, was how to keep Ricky from being subjected to the poisonous influ-

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ence of Belle for—well, two years; it had seemed certain that it would be about two years. "If he never adopted you, Ricky, I'm certain that your grandmother can make it stick, if you are both firm about it." Then I frowned and chewed my lip. "But you may have some trouble tomorrow. They may object to letting you go with her."

"How can they stop me? I'll just get in the car and go."

"It's not that simple, Ricky. These people who run the camp, they have to follow rules. Your Daddy—Miles, I mean—Miles turned you over to them; they won't be willing to turn you back over to anyone but him."

She stuck out her lower lip. "I won't go. I'm going with Grandma."

"Yes. But maybe I can tell you how to make it easy. If I were you, I wouldn't tell them that I'm leaving camp; I'd just tell them that your grandmother wants to take you for a ride—then don't come back."

Some of her tension relaxed. "All right."

"Uh . . . don't pack a bag or anything, or they may guess what you're doing. Don't try to take any clothes but those you are wearing at the time. Put any money or anything you really want to save into your pockets. You don't have much here that you would really mind losing, I suppose?"

"I guess not." But she looked wistful. "I've got a brand-new swim suit."

How do you explain to a child that there are times when you just must abandon your baggage? You can't—they'll go back into a burning building to save a doll, or a toy elephant. "Mmm . . . Ricky, have your grandmother tell them that she is taking you over to Arrowhead to have a swim with her . . . and that she may take you to dinner at the hotel there, but that she will have you back before taps. Then you can carry your swimming suit and a towel. But nothing else. Er, will your grandmother tell that fib for you?"

"I guess so. Yes, I'm sure she will. She says people have to tell little white fibs, or else people couldn't stand each other. But she says fibs were meant to be used, not abused."

"She sounds like a sensible person. You'll do it that way?"

"I'll do it just that way, Danny."

"Good." I picked up the battered envelope. "Ricky, I told you I had to go away. I have to go away for a very long time."

"How long?"

"Thirty years."

Her eyes grew wider, if possible. At eleven, thirty years is not a long time; it's forever. I added, "I'm sorry, Ricky. But I have to."

"Why?"

I could not answer that one. The true answer was unbelievable and a lie would not do. "Ricky, it's much

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too hard to explain. But I have to. I can't help it." I hesitated, then added, "I'm going to take the Long Sleep. Cold-sleep—you know what I mean."

She knew. Children get used to new ideas faster than adults do; cold-sleep was a favorite comic book theme. She looked horrified and protested, "But, Danny, *I'll never see you again!*"

"Yes, you will. It's a long time, but I'll see you again. And so will Pete. Because Pete is going with me; he's going to cold-sleep, too."

She glanced at Pete and looked more woebegone than ever. "But—Danny, why don't you and Pete just come down to Brawley and live with us? That would be ever so much better. Grandma will like Pete. She'll like you, too—she says there's nothing like having a man around the house."

"Ricky . . . dear Ricky . . . I *have* to. Please don't tease me." I started to tear open the envelope.

She looked angry and her chin started to quiver. "I think *she* has something to do with this!"

"What? If you mean Belle, she doesn't. Not exactly, anyway."

"She's not going to cold-sleep with you?"

I think I shuddered. "Good heavens, no! I'd run miles to avoid her."

Ricky seemed slightly mollified. "You know, I was so *mad* at you about *her*. I had an awful outrage."

"I'm sorry, Ricky. I'm truly sorry. You were right and I was wrong. But she hasn't anything to do with this. I'm through with her, forever and forever and cross my heart. Now about this." I held up the certificate for all that I owned in Hired Girl, Inc. "Do you know what it is?"

"No."

I explained it to her. "I'm giving this to you, Ricky. Because I'm going to be gone so long I want you to have it." I took the paper on which I had written an assignment to her, tore it up and put the pieces in my pocket; I could not risk doing it that way—it would be too easy for Belle to destroy a separate sheet and we were not yet out of the woods. I turned the certificate over and studied the standard assignment form on the back, trying to plan how to word it in the spaces provided. I finally squeezed in an assignment to the Bank of America in trust for—"Ricky, what is your full name?"

"Frederica Virginia. Frederica Virginia Gentry. You know."

"Is it 'Gentry'? I thought you said Miles had never adopted you?"

"Oh! I've been Ricky Gentry as long as I can remember. But you mean my *real* name. It's the same as Grandma's . . . the same as my real Daddy's. Heinicke. But nobody ever calls me that."

"They will now." I wrote "*Frederica Virginia Heinicke*" and add-

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ed *"and to be reassigned to her on her twenty-first birthday"* while prickles ran down my spine—my original assignment might have been defective, in any case.

I started to sign and then noticed our watchdog sticking her head out of the office. I glanced at my wrist, saw that we had been talking an hour; I was running out of minutes.

But I wanted it nailed down tight. "Ma'am!"

"Yes?"

"By any chance, is there a notary public around here? Or must I find one in the village?"

"I am a notary. What do you wish?"

"Oh, good! Wonderful! Do you have your seal?"

"I never go anywhere without it."

So I signed my name under her eye and she even stretched a point (on Ricky's assurance that she knew me and Pete's silent testimony to my respectability as a fellow member of the fraternity of cat people) and used the long form: ". . . *known to me personally as being said Daniel B. Davis.*" When she embossed her seal through my signature and her own I sighed with relief. Just let Belle try to find a way to twist that one!

She glanced at it curiously but said nothing. I said solemnly, "Tragedies cannot be undone but this will help. The kid's education, you know."

She refused a fee and went back into the office. I turned back to Ricky and said, "Give this to your grandmother. Tell her to take it to a branch of the Bank of America in Brawley. They'll do everything else." I laid it in front of her.

She did not touch it. "That's worth a lot of money, isn't it?"

"Quite a bit. It will be worth more."

"I don't want it."

"But, Ricky, I want you to have it."

"I don't want it. I won't *take* it." Her eyes filled with tears and her voice got unsteady. "You're going away forever and . . . and you don't care about me anymore." She sniffed. "Just like when you got engaged to *her*. When you could just as easily bring Pete and come live with Grandma and me. I don't *want* your money!"

"Ricky. Listen to me, Ricky. It's too late. I couldn't take it back now if I wanted to. It's already yours."

"I don't care. I won't ever touch it." She reached out and stroked Pete. "Pete wouldn't go away and leave me . . . only you're going to make him. Now I won't even have Pete."

I answered unsteadily, "Ricky? Rikki-tikki-tavi? You want to see Pete . . . and me, again?"

I could hardly hear her. "Of course I do. But I won't."

"But you can."

"Huh? How? You said you

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were going to take the Long Sleep . . . thirty years, you said."

"And I am. I have to. But, Ricky, here is what you can do. Be a good girl, go live with your grandmama, go to school—and just let this money pile up. When you are twenty-one—if you still want to see us—you'll have enough money to take the Long Sleep yourself. When you wake up, I'll be there, waiting for you. Pete and I will both be waiting for you. That's a solemn promise."

Her expression changed but she did not smile. She thought about it quite a long time, then said, "You'll really be there?"

"Yes. But we'll have to make a date. If you do it, Ricky, do it just the way I tell you. You arrange it with the Cosmopolitan Insurance Company and you make sure that you take your Sleep in the Riverside Sanctuary in Riverside . . . and you make very sure that they have orders to wake you up on the first day of May, two thousand and one, exactly. I'll be there that day, waiting for you. If you want me to be there when you first open your eyes, you'll have to leave word for that, too, or they won't let me farther than the waiting room—I know that Sanctuary; they're very fussy." I took out an envelope which I had prepared before I left Denver. "You don't have to remember this; I've got it all written out for you. Just save it, and on your twenty-first birthday, you can make up your mind. But you can be sure that Pete and I will be there, waiting for you, whether you show up or not." I laid the prepared instructions on the stock certificate.

I thought that I had her convinced, but she did not touch either of them. She stared at them, then presently said, "Danny?"

"Yes, Ricky?"

She would not look up and her voice was so low that I could barely hear her. But I did hear her. "If I do . . . will you marry me?"

My ears roared and the lights flickered. But I answered steadily and much louder than she had spoken. "Yes, Ricky. That's what I want. That's why I'm doing this."

I had just one more thing to leave with her: a prepared envelope marked "*To Be Opened in the Event of the Death of Miles Gentry.*" I did not explain it to her; I just told her to keep it. It contained proof of Belle's varied career, matrimonial and otherwise. In the hands of a lawyer it should make a court fight over his will no contest at all.

Then I gave her my class ring from Tech (it was all I had) and told her it was hers; we were engaged. "It's too big for you but you can keep it. I'll have another one for you when you wake up."

"I don't want another one."

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"All right. Now better tell Pete goodby, Ricky. I've got to go. I can't wait a minute longer."

She hugged Pete, then handed him back to me, looked me steadily in the eye even though tears were running down her nose and leaving clean streaks. "Goodby, Danny."

"Not 'goodby,' Ricky. Just 'so long.' We'll be waiting for you."

It was a quarter of ten when I got back to the village. I found that a helicopter bus was due to leave for the center of the city in twenty-five minutes so I sought out the only used-car lot and made one of the fastest deals in history, letting my car go for half what it was worth for cash in hand at once. It left me just time to sneak Pete into the bus (they are fussy about airsick cats) and we reached the Mutual Assurance Company just after eleven o'clock.

Mutual's Mr. Powell was much annoyed that I had canceled my arrangements for Mutual to handle my estate and was especially inclined to lecture me over having lost my papers. "I can't very well ask the same judge to pass on your committal twice in the same twenty-four hours. It's most irregular."

I waved money at him, cash money with convincing figures on it. "Never mind eating me out about it, Sergeant. Do you want my business, or don't you? If not, say so, and I'll beat it on up to Central Valley. Because I'm going today."

He still fumed but he gave in. Then he grumbled about adding six months to the cold-sleep period and did not want to guarantee an exact date of awakening. "The contracts ordinarily read 'plus-or-minus one month' to allow for administrative hazards."

"This one doesn't. This one reads April 27, 2001. But I don't care whether it says 'Mutual' at the top, or 'Central Valley.' Mr. Powell, I'm buying and you're selling. If you don't sell what I want to buy, I'll go where they do sell it."

He changed the contract and we both initialed it.

At twelve straight up I was back in for my final check with their medical examiner. He looked at me. "Did you stay sober?"

"Sober as a judge."

"That's no recommendation. We'll see." He went over me almost as carefully as he had "yesterday." At last he put down his rubber hammer and said, "I'm surprised. You're in much better shape than you were yesterday. Amazingly so."

"Doc, you don't know the half of it."

I held Pete and soothed him while they gave him the first sedative. Then I lay back myself and let them work on me. I suppose I could have waited another day, or even longer, just as well as not

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—but the truth was that I was frantically anxious to get back to 2001.

About four in the afternoon, with Pete's flat head resting on my chest, I went happily to sleep again.

XII

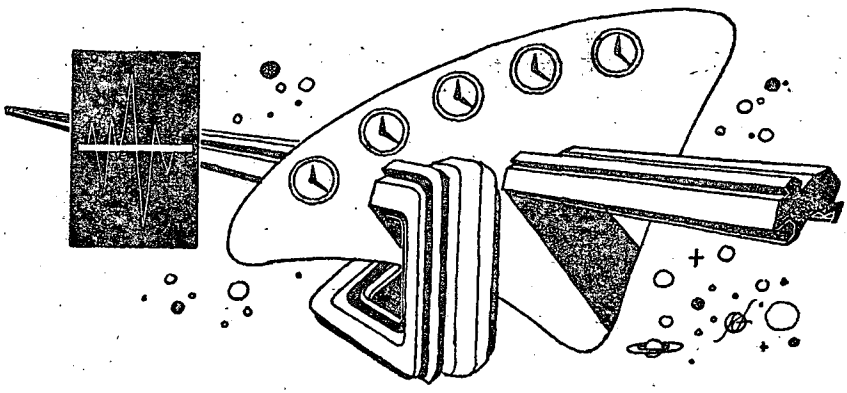
My dreams were pleasanter this time. The only bad one I remember was not too bad, but simply endless frustration. It was a cold dream in which I wandered shivering through branching corridors, trying every door I came to, thinking that the next one would surely be the Door into Summer, with Ricky waiting on the other side. I was hampered by Pete, "following me ahead of me," that exasperating habit cats have of scalloping back and forth between the legs of persons trusted not to step on them or kick them.

At each new door he would duck between my feet, look out it, find it still winter outside, and reverse himself, almost tripping me.

But neither one of us gave up his conviction that the next door would be the right one.

I woke up easily this time, with no disorientation—in fact the doctor was somewhat irked that all I wanted was some breakfast, the Great Los Angeles *Times,* and no chit-chat. I didn't think it was worthwhile to explain to him that this was my second time around; he would not have believed me.

There was a note waiting for me, dated a week earlier, from John:



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Dear Dan,

All right, I give up. How did you do it?

I'm complying with your request not to be met, against Jenny's wishes. She sends her love and hopes that you won't be too long in looking us up—I've tried to explain to her that you expect to be busy for a while. We are both fine although I tend to walk where I used to run. Jenny is even more beautiful than she used to be.

Hasta la vista, amigo,

John

P.S. If the enclosure is not enough, just phone—there is plenty more where it came from. We've done pretty well, I think.

I considered calling John, both to say hello and to tell him about a colossal new idea I had had while asleep—a gadget to change bathing from a chore to a sybaritic delight. But I decided not to; I had other things on my mind. So I made notes while the notion was fresh and then got some sleep, with Pete's head tucked into my armpit. I wish I could cure him of that. It's flattering but a nuisance.

On Monday, April 30, I checked out and went over to Riverside, where I got a room in the old Mission Inn. They made the predictable fuss about taking a cat into a room and an autobellhop is not responsive to bribes—hardly an improvement. But the assistant manager had more flexibility in his synapses; he listened to reason as long as it was crisp and rustled. I did not sleep well; I was too excited.

I presented myself to the Director of the Riverside Sanctuary at ten o'clock the next morning.

"Doctor Rumsey, my name is Daniel B. Davis. You have a committed client here named Frederica Heinicke?"

"I suppose you can identify yourself?"

I showed him a 1970 driver's license, issued in Denver, and my withdrawal certificate from Forest Lawn Sanctuary. He looked over them and me, and handed them back. I said anxiously, "I think she's scheduled for withdrawal today. By any chance, are there any instructions to permit me to be present? I don't mean the processing routines; I mean at the last minute, when she's ready for the final restimulant and consciousness."

He shoved his lips out and looked judicial. "Our instructions for this client do not read to wake her today."

"No?" I felt disappointed and hurt.

"No. Her exact wishes are as follows: instead of necessarily being waked today, she wished not to be waked at all until you showed up." He looked me over and smiled. "You must have a heart of gold. I can't account for it on your beauty."

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I sighed. "Thanks, Doctor."

"You can wait in the lobby, or come back. We won't need you for a couple of hours."

I went back to the lobby, got Pete and took him for a walk. I had parked him there in his new travel bag and he was none too pleased with it, even though I had bought one as much like his old one as possible and had installed a one-way window in it the night before. It probably didn't smell right as yet.

We passed the "real nice place" but I was not hungry even though I hadn't been able to eat much breakfast—Pete had eaten my eggs and had turned up his nose at yeast strips. At eleven thirty I was back at the Sanctuary. Finally they let me in to see her.

All I could see was her face; her body was covered. But it was my Ricky, grown woman size and looking like a slumbering angel.

"She's under post-hypnotic instruction," Dr. Rumsey said softly. "If you will stand just there, I'll bring her up. Uh, I think you had better put that cat outside."

"No, Doctor."

He started to speak, shrugged, turned back to his patient. "Wake up, Frederica. Wake up. You must wake up now."

Her eyelids fluttered, she opened her eyes. They wandered for an instant, then she caught sight of us and smiled sleepily. "Danny . . . and Pete." She raised both arms—and I saw that she was wearing my Tech class ring on her left thumb.

Pete chirrlupped and jumped on the bed, started doing shoulder dives against her in an ecstasy of welcome. . . .

Dr. Rumsey wanted her to stay overnight, but Ricky would have none of it. So I had a cab brought to the door and we jumped to Brawley. Her grandmother had died in 1980 and her social links there had gone by attrition, but she had left things in storage there—books mostly. I ordered them shipped to Aladdin, care of John Sutton. Ricky was a little dazzled by the changes in her old home town and never let go my arm, but she never succumbed to that terrible homesickness which is the great hazard of the Sleep. She merely wanted to get out of Brawley as quickly as possible.

So I hired another cab and we jumped to Yuma. There I signed the county clerk's book in a fine round hand, using my full name "Daniel Boone Davis," so that there could be no possible doubt as to which D. B. Davis had designed this magnum opus. A few minutes later I was standing with her little hand in mine and choking over, "I, Daniel, take thee, Frederica . . . till death do us part."

Pete was my best man. The witnesses we scraped up in the courthouse.

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We got out of Yuma at once and jumped to a guest ranch near Tucson, where we had a cabin away from the main lodge and equipped with our own Eager Beaver to fetch and carry so that we did not need to see anyone. Pete fought a monumental battle with the tom who until then had been boss of the ranch, whereupon we had to keep Pete in or watch him. This was the only shortcoming I can think of. Ricky took to being married as if she had invented it, and me—well, I had Ricky.

There isn't much more to be said. Voting Ricky's Hired Girl stock—it was still the largest single block—I had McBee eased upstairs to "research engineer emeritus" and put Chuck in as chief engineer. John is boss of Aladdin but keeps threatening to retire—an idle threat. He and I and Jenny control the company, since he was careful to issue preferred stock and to float bonds, rather than surrender control. I'm not on the board of either corporation; I don't run them and they compete. Competition is a good idea—Darwin thought well of it.

Me, I'm just the "Davis Engineering Company"—a drafting room, a small shop, and an old machinist who thinks I'm crazy but follows my drawings to exact tolerance. When we finish something, I put it out for license.

I had my notes on Twitchell recovered. Then I wrote and told him I had made it and returned via cold sleep . . . and apologized abjectly for having "doubted" him. I asked if he wanted to see the manuscript when I finished. He never answered so I guess he is still sore at me.

But I *am* writing it and I'll put it in all major libraries even if I have to publish at my own expense. I owe him that much. I owe him much more; I owe him for Ricky. And for Pete. I'm going to title it *Unsung Genius*.

Jenny and John look as if they would last forever. Thanks to geriatrics, fresh air, sunshine, exercise, and a mind that never worries Jenny is prettier than ever at . . . well, 63 is my guess. John thinks that I am "merely" clairvoyant and does not want to look at the evidence. Well, how *did* I do it? I tried to explain it to Ricky, but she got upset when I told her that while we were on our honeymoon I was actually and no foolin' also up at Boulder, and that while I was visiting her at the Girl Scout camp I was also lying in a drugged stupor in San Fernando Valley.

She turned white. So I said, "Let's put it hypothetically. It's all logical when you look at it mathematically. Suppose we take a guinea pig—white with brown splotches. We put him in the time cage and kick him back a week. But a week earlier we had already found him there, so at that time

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we had put him in a pen with himself. Now we've got two guinea pigs . . . although actually it's just one guinea pig, one being the other one a week older. So when you took one of them and kicked him back a week and—"

"Wait a minute! Which one?"

"Which one? Why, there never was but one. You took the one a week younger, of course, because—"

"You said there was just one. Then you said there were two. Then you said the two were just one. But you were going to take one of the two . . . when there was just one—"

"I'm trying to *explain* how two can be just one. If you take the younger—"

"How can you tell which guinea pig is younger when they look just alike?"

"Well, you could cut off the tail of the one you are sending back. Then when it came back, you would—"

"Why, Danny, how cruel! Besides, guinea pigs don't have tails."

She seemed to think that proved something. I should never have tried to explain.

But Ricky is not one to fret over things that aren't important. Seeing that I was upset, she said softly, "Come here, dear." She rumpled what hair I have left and kissed me. "One of you is all I want, dearest. Two might be more than I could manage. Tell me one thing— Are you glad you waited for me to grow up?"

I did my darnedest to convince her that I was.

But the explanation I tried to give does not explain everything. I missed a point even though I was riding the merry-go-round myself and counting the revolutions:

Why didn't I see the notice of my own withdrawal?

I mean the second one, in April 2001, not the one in December 2000. I should have; I was there and I used to check those lists. I was awakened (second time) on Friday, April 27, 2001; it should have been in next morning's *Times*. But I did not see it. I've looked it up since and there it is: "D. B. Davis," in the *Times* for Saturday, April 28, 2001.

Philosophically, just one line of ink can make a different universe as surely as having the continent of Europe missing. Is the old "multiple universes" notion correct? Did I bounce into a different universe, different because I had monkeyed with the setup? Even though I found Ricky and Pete in it? Is there another universe somewhere (or *somewhen*) in which Pete yowled until he despaired, then wandered off to fend for himself, deserted? And in which Ricky never managed to flee with her grandmother, but had to suffer the vindictive wrath of Belle?

One line of fine print isn't enough. I probably fell asleep that

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night and missed reading my own name, then stuffed the paper down the chute next morning, thinking I had finished with it. I *am* absent-minded, particularly when I'm thinking about a job.

But what would I have done if I *had* seen it? Gone there, met myself—and gone stark mad? No, for if I *had* seen it, I wouldn't have done the things I did afterwards—"afterwards" for me—which led up to it. Therefore it could never have happened that way. The control is a negative feedback type, with a built-in "fail safe," because the very existence of that line of print depended on my not seeing it; the apparent possibility that I might have seen it is one of the excluded "not possibles" of the basic circuit design.

"There's a divinity that shapes our ends, rough-hew them how we will." Free will and predestination in one sentence, and both true. There is only *one* real world, with one past and one future. "As it was in the beginning, is now and ever shall be, world without end, amen." Just *one* . . . but big enough and complicated enough to include free will and time travel and everything else in its linkages and feedbacks and guard circuits. You're allowed to do anything inside the rules . . . but you come back to your own door.

I'm not the only person who has time-traveled. Fort listed too many cases not explainable otherwise and so did Ambrose Bierce. And there were those two ladies in the gardens of the Trianon. I have a hunch, too, that old Doc Twitchell closed that switch oftener than he admitted . . . to say nothing of others who may have learned how in the past or future. But I doubt if much ever comes of it. In my case only three people know and two don't believe me. You can't do much if you do time-travel. As Fort said, you railroad only when it comes time to railroad.

But I can't get Leonard Vincent out of my mind. Was he Leonardo da Vinci? Did he beat his way across the continent and go back with Columbus? The encyclopedia says that his life was such-and-such—but he might have revised the record. I know how that is; I've had to do a little of it. They didn't have social security numbers, ID cards, nor fingerprints in fifteenth century Italy; he could have swung it.

But think of him, marooned from everything he was used to, aware of flight, of power, of a million things, trying desperately to picture them so that they could be made—but doomed to frustration because you simply can't do the things we do today without centuries of former art to build on.

Tantalus had it easier.

I've thought about what could be done with time travel commercially if it were declassified—making short jumps, setting up ma-

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chinery to get back, taking along components. But some day you'd make one jump too many and not be able to set up for your return, because it's not time to "railroad." Something simple, like a special alloy, could whip you. And there is that truly awful hazard of not knowing which way you are going. Imagine winding up at the court of Henry VIII with a load of subflexive fasartas intended for the twenty-fifth century. Being becalmed in the Horse Latitudes would be better.

No, you should never market a gadget until the bugs are out of it.

But I'm not worried about "paradoxes" or "causing anachronisms"—if a thirtieth century engineer does smooth out the bugs and then sets up transfer stations and trade, it will be because the Builder designed the universe that way. He gave us eyes, two hands, a brain; anything we do with them *can't* be a paradox. He doesn't need busybodies to "enforce" His laws; they enforce themselves. There are no miracles and the word "anachronism" is a semantic blank.

But I don't worry about philosophy any more than Pete does. Whatever the truth about this world, I like it. I've found my Door into Summer and I would not time-travel again for fear of getting off at the wrong station. Maybe my son will, but if he does I will urge him to go forward, not back. "Back" is for emergencies; the future is better than the past. Despite the crapehangers, romanticists, and anti-intellectuals, the world steadily grows better because the human mind, applying itself to environment, *makes* it better. With hands . . . with tools . . . with horse sense and science and engineering.

Most of these long-haired belittlers can't drive a nail nor use a slide rule. I'd like to invite them into Dr. Twitchell's cage and ship them back to the twelfth century—then let them enjoy it.

But I am not mad at anybody and I like now. Except that Pete is getting older, a little fatter, and not so inclined to choose a younger opponent; all too soon he must take the very Long Sleep. I hope with all my heart that his gallant little soul may find its Door into Summer, where catnip fields abound, and tabbies are complacent, and robot opponents are programed to fight fiercely—but always lose—and people have friendly laps, and legs to strop against, but never a foot that kicks.

Ricky is getting fat, too, but for a temporary, happier reason. It has just made her more beautiful and her sweet eternal *Yea!* is unchanged, but it isn't comfortable for her. I'm working on gadgets to make things easier. It just isn't very *convenient* to be a woman; something ought to be done and I'm convinced that some things can be done. There's that matter

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of leaning over, and also the backaches—I'm working on those, and I've built her a hydraulic bed that I think I will patent. It ought to be easier to get in and out of a bath tub than it is, too. I haven't solved that yet.

For old Pete I've built a "cat bathroom" to use in bad weather—automatic, self-replenishing, sanitary, and odorless. However, Pete, being a proper cat, prefers to go outdoors, and he has never given up his conviction that if you just try *all* the doors, one of them is bound to be the Door into Summer.

You know, I think he is right.

THE END

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When Damon Knight reviewed the Ballantine collection of my short stories, FAR AND AWAY, *he particularly regretted the absence of this attempt at blending science fiction and detection. Since it originally appeared in a magazine of small circulation and has not been reprinted, Mr. Knight's enthusiasm emboldens me to revive it here, in a slightly expanded form.*

Gandolphus

by ANTHONY BOUCHER

"IF THERE WAS A DETECTIVE'S UNion," said my friend Fergus O'Breen, "I'd be out on my ear."

It was a good hook. I filled the steins again with Tuborg dark and got ready to listen.

"Remember that Compleat Werewolf business right here in Berkeley?" Fergus went on. "Or the time machine alibi in L.A.? You take now Dr. Fell or H. M. or Merlini; practically every case they get looks like it's supernatural or paranormal and they just plain know it isn't and start in solving it by 'How was this normally gimmicked?' Rules of the profession. Gentleman's agreement. Only to me things happen, and they don't fit."

"And what was it this time?" I asked. "A poltergeist? Or an authentic Martian invasion?"

Fergus shook his head. "It was . . . Gandolphus. And what Gandolphus was . . . Look: I'll tell you how I got dealt in. Then you can read the rest for yourself. I wangled a photostat of the damnedest document . . .

"It was when I was back in New York last year. Proving a Long Lost Heir was a phony—nice routine profitable job. So it's all polished off and I stick around Manhattan a couple of days just for kicks and I'm having dinner with friends when I meet this character Harrington. I won't describe him; he characterizes himself better than I could. So he learns I'm a private investigator; and just like people learn you're a writer and give with their life histories, he drops his problem in my lap.

"It looks more like a police job to me, and I tell him so; and since I know Bill Zobel in his precinct I say I'll introduce him. He's all hot to get started, once he's got the idea; so we take a cab down and Bill thinks it's worth looking into and we all go over to Harrington's apartment in Sheridan Square.

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"Now you've got to understand about Bill Zobel. He is—or was at this time I'm talking about—a damned good straight cop. Absolutely efficient, more intelligent than average . . . and human. Tough enough when he had to be, but no rough stuff for its own sake.

"Bill and I settled down in the living room to watch for whoever or whatever Gandolphus might be, and Harrington went into his study to type a full formal statement of the complaint he'd sketched to us. It was about two A.M. by now; and we were too tired for chess or cribbage even if we hadn't been kind of scared by the too damned beautiful boards and men Harrington offered us. So Bill Zobel switched on WQXR and we sat listening to music and Harrington's typing.

"The typing stopped at three. Nobody had come or gone, not even Gandolphus, through the one door of the study. At three fifteen we went in. Harrington was dead, and to me it looked natural."

Fergus stopped.

"To date," I said flatly, "this is no payment for good beer."

He reached for his briefcase. "At that point," he said, "I thought it was just about the most pointless evening I'd ever spent. Then, while we waited for the men from the Medical Examiner's office, Bill and I read what Harrington had been typing."

He handed me a sheaf of photostats. They were labeled *Statement found in and beside typewriter of Charles Harrington, deceased.*

My name is Charles Harrington. I am 53 years of age, and a native American citizen. My residence is 13 Sheridan Square.

That is, I believe, the correct way to begin a statement? But the way from that point on leads through thornier brambles or, to shift the metaphor, through a maze in which the desideratum is to find, not the locus of egress, but the locus of entrance.

My name may not be unfamiliar to such as are interested in hagiography and iconography. My collection of Tenth Century objects of virtu relating to Christian devotional practices has made my apartment, I dare say, an irreligious Mecca to many (inevitably one recalls the Roman Catholic church which one observed in San Francisco, which so unbigotedly advertises itself as "a Mecca of devotion for the faithful since 1906"); and hardly any one concerned with the variant vagaries of the mystic mind can be totally ignorant of the series of monographs which will some day form the definitive "life" of St. Gandolphus the Lesser. (I place the term "*life*" within quotation marks because the purpose of the book is to demonstrate the fact that the canonized gentleman never existed.)

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The habits of a scholar should, perhaps, make easier the compilation of such a statement as this; but familiar though I may be with the miraculous in the Tenth Century, the . . . shall we say, unusual in the Twentieth is more disturbing.

Let us put it that the matter began a month ago, on Saturday, October the thirtieth. I was taking my conventional evening stroll, which on this particular evening led me toward Washington Square. The weather was warm, you will recall; and you are doubtless familiar with Washington Square of a warm evening?

The mating proclivities of the human animal can flourish as well in autumn as in spring, if the thermometer be but auspicious; and Washington Square of such an evening is an unsettling spectacle to a man of voluntary celibacy. I had regretted my choice of locale and started to turn homeward when the thing flashed in my face.

It seemed, in fact, aimed directly at my eyes; and I knew a moment of terror, since sight has ever been to me by far the most rewarding of the senses. And although I dodged its direct impact, by swifter muscular response than I should have thought myself capable of (you will condone the informality of that construction), I felt a renewal of terror in the instant of the sudden blinding flash of its explosion.

The couples near me were too engrossed in other pursuits to pay any heed to me as I stood there trembling for what must have been a full minute. Only at the end of that time was I able to open my eyes, reassure myself that my sight was unimpaired, and observe upon the grass the shattered remains of what had so disproportionately terrified me. It was obvious from the fragments that the object had been a child's toy, modeled not upon the engines of my own childhood or the aeroplanes of my nephews', but upon an interplanetary spaceship such as is employed by the hero of cartoon adventures named, I believe, Buck Ruxton.

That the child should make no attempt to reclaim his toy after so nearly serious an accident is understandable. It is possibly also understandable that I, after so severe a nervous shock, was forced in the course of the short journey home to stop in three successive drinking establishments and in each to consume a pony of brandy.

I relate all this in order to make clear why I, a normally abstemious if definitely not abstentious man, retired that night with sufficient alcohol within me (I had added a fourth brandy upon my return to the apartment) to ensure an unusually, even abnormally sound sleep. It does not explain why I awoke next morning in most exquisite agony; but no hypothesis yet advanced has explained why,

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upon occasions, the mildest overindulgence may produce more severe reactions than many a protracted debauch.

Only after the ingestion of such palliatives as aspirin, raw egg, tomato juice and coffee was I sufficiently conscious to become aware of what had happened in my apartment during my sleep.

To put it briefly and colloquially: Someone had drunk himself silly. Silly, indeed, he had been to start with; for indiscriminately he had emptied my cooking sherry and my Sandeman '07, my finest cognac and the blended rye which my younger nephew fancies. And all direct from the bottles: the dead soldiers stood all a-row, but no glasses had been soiled.

As I assured you at the precinct station, no key save my own opens my door. Because of the value of my objects of virtu, even the superintendent and the cleaning woman are admitted only by appointment. The windows could be considered as entrances only by the most experienced "human fly."

I need not say, therefore, that I was sorely perplexed by the puzzle thus presented to me, nor that I wondered why a burglar, by whatever means he had procured admittance, should confine his attentions to my potable treasures when the apartment contains so many portable articles of value.

I took no action. My civic conscience is not readily aroused, and a police inquiry would disorder my life far more thoroughly than had the burglar. And the next occurence, involving though it did those very articles of value neglected in the first instance, contained no element of interest to the police.

After a night of unusually heavy sleep occasioned by late work on Hagerstein's ridiculously inept thesis on St. Gandolphus, I awoke to find a light still burning faintly in this study. I entered, to discover that the gleam was that of a vigil light (Late Ninth Century) burning before my treasured Tenth Century image of Our Lady, Font of Piety. Upon the prie-dieu (Thirteenth Century, but betraying unquestionable Tenth Century influence), which normally stood across the room but now had been adjusted directly before the image, lay a Tenth Century illuminated breviary, open at the Office of the Blessed Virgin. Most startling fact of all, there was still visible upon the worn velvet of the prie-dieu the fresh and unmistakable imprint of human knees.

You will surely recall the legend (it is no more, as I have incontestably established) of the novice who fell asleep in the midst of copying a manuscript and awakened to find his task completed and the text illuminated far beyond his powers, with the minute signature woven into one of the initial letters: *Gandolphus*. There persists a handful of similar accounts of the unob-

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served and somewhat elfin post mortem activities of St. Gandolphus the Lesser; you will readily understand why the unseen fellow-tenant of my apartment was thenceforth, to me, Gandolphus.

But the contradictory nature of his activities puzzled me; one night of drunken orgy, one night of kneeling prayer. Nor was the puzzle closer to solution upon that morning on which I discovered in this typewriter an exquisite sonnet—so remarkable in its perfection that it has since been accepted for publication, under a pseudonym, by one of our better journals—signed (as though the invader could read my mind) with the name *Gandolphus*.

I shall pass rapidly over the embarrassing morning when I awakened with a curious pain in my back, to discover in the guest-room a fair-haired young woman who greeted me with the indecipherable remark "Honey! . . . Hey! For a minute I thought you was him!", who proved to be the vendor of cigarettes at a nearby place of entertainment, and who departed abruptly and in a state of bewilderment conceivably exceeding my own.

Nor shall I linger over the disappearance of two thousand dollars in ten-dollar bills, present in the apartment because a certain type of art dealer, I must confess, prefers transactions of this sort (fuller details, I assure you, would have no bearing upon this investigation), and the ecstasy of the more impoverished Italians in Bleecker Street over the vaguely described stranger who had pounded on shoddy doors in dead of night to deliver handfuls of bills.

I shall simply stress here the cumulative inconsistency of these proceedings: inebriety, religiosity, poetry, eroticism, philanthropy . . . an insane medley of the loftiest and basest experiences of which the human animal is capable.

It is this inconsistency which leads me unhesitatingly to reject the most apparently obvious "solution" of my mystery: that the fellow occupant of my apartment is no other than myself; that Box and Cox, Harrington and Gandolphus, are, in short, Jekyll and Hyde.

For whereas of his actions to date the inebriety and the concupiscence might be considered evidence of Hydean depravity, the sonnet and the almsgiving represent an exalted sublimation of which, I confess, the poor Jekyll in question is flatly incapable; and the religiosity, to my mind, fits into neither character. This is not I, nor yet another I. This is a being unknown to me, sharing the apartment to which only I have access, and indulging in actions which seem to me to have only this in common: that all represent singularly heightened forms of human experience.

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This brings me to what I fear may well be the most overwhelming experience which Gandolphus has yet known, and the reason which has driven me, at whatever cost to the placidity of my own ordered existence, finally to lay this problem before a private detective and, upon his insistence, to communicate it to the police.

When I conveyed to you the nature of the incidents already here related, I found it hard to explain even to myself what "mental block" (if I may be permitted so jargonic a term) prevented me from communicating to you this evidence of the ultimate extremity of the quest of Gandolphus.

I refer, of course, to the kitchen knife which I discovered this morning still coated with blood which a private laboratory this afternoon assured me is human.

* * *

It is considerate of me, I think, to put those three asterisks there to denote the transition.

The knife, of course, is what alters the whole situation. That one bloody fact is sufficient to disrupt the tranquil *modus vivendi* which I believed that I had attained.

If you professional detectives, public and private, are as perceptive as, in rummaging around in this mind, I find some reason to believe you are, you will by now have realized many things. You will have understood, for instance, precisely what happened that Saturday night in Washington Square, and that the bright and exploding object was not a toy spaceship.

You will even understand, perhaps, which word should have been underlined in that last sentence.

But I am not at all sorry that things should end as they now must. I have felt hampered here. It is not the ideal habitation in which to pursue my research. I was forced to realize this, in a somewhat comical but nonetheless vexatious manner, in the fourth of the episodes related above, and again to some extent in the sixth, that of the knife. There is also the matter of music, which I gather from reading to be one of the major human experiences; but these ears that I employ are tone-deaf.

In short, I need a better vehicle. And just outside of this room—listening, as a matter of fact, to music at this moment—is (I find the phrase lying somewhere in a corner of this mind) metal more attractive.

There is no reason why I may not be frank. You will surely have gathered that it is imperative that I explore and realize every sensation of the inhabitants of this planet. Only through this experience can I convey to the ships that follow a proper scout's report on the symbiotic potential here. Every sensation which the host may undergo

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and force its symbiotic companion to share—*I must know what it is like.*

So I am turning off this machine, which has served its introductory purpose. But before I abandon it, I shall (curious how with practice it becomes possible to use them awake as well as asleep) use its fingers to type

Respectfully yours,
(I believe that is the proper subscription?),
GANDOLPHUS

I took my time about refilling the steins. The photostats deserved some thought. I was not particularly inclined to argue with Fergus' description of them as the damnedest document I'd ever read in my life.

"I suppose," I ventured finally, "the knife did check—dimensions of blade, blood type and so on—with some known killing on the night in question?"

"It did,' said Fergus. "An Italian peddler."

"And the knife had only Harrington's prints on it?"

"Of course."

"The pattern's clear enough. Obviously neurotic self-centered celibate entering the perilous fifties. Very self-revealing—pretty standard schizoid set-up, though I'll admit that wild episode of philanthropy is a new one on me. Harrington's death was natural, I suppose?"

Fergus grunted. "Syncope was the word the M. E. used. In English words, something turned off the machine."

"It's a good case," I admitted. "One of the odder build-ups to murder. But why on earth—"

"Why should it get me kicked out of the union? Because Bill Zobel dozed off."

I said "So?"

"It was late and it kept getting later at the station while they piled up all these facts about knives and syncopes. And finally Bill dozed off. He woke up when a patrolman came in yelling he'd picked up a hot suspect in a recent series of muggings. Nothing to do with the Harrington business; but the muggings were Bill's baby and he went off to question the suspect.

"The guy was guilty all right. Plenty of evidence turned up later. But he never came to trial. He died of the beating he got that night . . . from Bill Zobel, the tough straight cop who never stood for rough stuff.

"It got hushed up; there was nobody to make a beef. But I was there; I saw the guy before the ambulance came. It was an artistic job; that night Gandolphus learned everything he needed to know about sadism—he hadn't tried that one yet; couldn't, maybe, with Harrington's body.

"Maybe you didn't hear out in the West about the rest of Zobel's career. The beating was bad

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enough. Then they began to watch him when they saw he was spending damned near his whole month's salary on concert and opera tickets. Precinct captains aren't exactly used to that in their men.

"The next month's salary, and a pretty penny to boot, went to Chambord and Twenty-One and Giovanni's and Lüchow's. He was dining like Nero Wolfe as a guest of Lucullus, with Escoffier in the kitchen. He was also hanging around off-duty in some joints in the Village—the kind of joint a policeman never goes into except for a raid, when you don't need a matron to search the sopranos.

"The talk that started died down a little when Zobel suddenly got engaged to his captain's daughter —hell of a sweet kid; you could still smell the starch-and-incense of the convent, but her eyes had a gleam . . . Later on, when the gleam was doused, she told me they'd never had a clinch you couldn't show on a TV screen; our friend was learning that there was more to love than backaches. Her Bill, she said, was so groundlessly jealous he made Othello look like the agreeable husband in a Restoration comedy.

"The pay-off came when Zobel picked up a dope-peddler and went on a jag with the bastard's bindles.

"His record up to then was so clean they let him down easy and fixed a psychiatric discharge. Next month he got picked up once as a peeping Tom and once for inciting to riot in Union Square. Gandolphus wasn't missing a sensation."

"But you see," I interrupted, "we did hear about Zobel in the West." It was a fine rich feeling to have the topper for the first time in my years of knowing Fergus O'Breen. "We even met him. He was a guest speaker at a meeting of Mystery Writers of America. He told us, and damned frankly too, about the nervous breakdown he'd had last year and the psychiatric discharge and the course of treatments that led the police psychiatrist to recertify him finally. Lieutenant Zobel's happily married, professionally successful . . ."

Fergus looked glum and disgruntled. "So you knew the topper," he said. "Yes, Bill's a normal man again. This time the machine wasn't turned off. Gandolphus just left. He'd found out what he needed. And like a good scout, he's gone back with his report on our symbiotic potential.

"Care to make a small bet as to what that report is?"

Normally one tries to avoid repetition of theme in the same issue; but sometimes contrasting variants can be fascinating. Go on now to meet Miss Jane Roberts, and see what a completely different story a gifted novice can create upon a similar theme.

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This is the first published story by Jane Roberts, poet, housewife, door-to-door saleswoman of knives and (unless C. M. Kornbluth and his camera both lie) "a stunning little brunette" who ranks high among what Kornbluth calls "Boucher's Bellettristic Beauties." Such discoveries do have their charm for a middle-aged editor; but the important thing with Miss Roberts (as with that other BBB, Mildred Clingerman, earlier in this issue) is that she can write *— freshly, imaginatively, and sounding (God bless her!) like no one else in or out of our field.*

The Red Wagon

by JANE ROBERTS

PHILLIP LAY IN PETER'S BODY, SNUGgled up with the teddy bear in the farthest corner of the bed. He lay muttering to himself in the darkness, urging Peter's baby tongue to enunciate words that he would not speak for years to come.

But Peter shivered and opened his eyes. He glanced about his room fearfully, only letting his head protrude from the warm covers. Then he relaxed. Everything was the same as before. He could make out the shape of the straight chair by his bed, the outline of the white enameled bureau, the box of toys in the corner.

Still, something woke him up. He wiggled about uncomfortably wondering if he was scared enough to go into his parents' room. Still considering, he sat up cautiously.

"For God's sake, go back to sleep," Phillip said.

Peter froze. He was only five years old but he knew that voices shouldn't speak without people. Still, it was a grown-up order, and children had to obey grownups. He thought about it for a second, then lay back down and closed his eyes.

But no one had said anything about obeying a grown-up voice with no one around. He waited, then opened his eyes slyly, one at a time. A voice can't spank, he reasoned, but he moved cautiously, just in case.

"Will you go to sleep?" Phillip groaned. He didn't want to frighten the boy, but nights *were* the only time he had to himself.

Peter cringed. The voice sounded awfully near. He looked around

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wildly—there just wasn't anyone. Trembling, he lay back in the darkness. Could it be a bogy-man? His heart jumped at the thought. No, he'd been a good boy all day yesterday, at least he thought he had. Still . . .

"Are you a bogy-man?" he whispered.

"No, I'm not a bogy-man," Phillip muttered, annoyed at the turn of events.

"Well, who are you then?"

Phillip sighed. A question and answer session with a child at this hour of the night! "I'm just . . . just Phillip," he said. "Now go to sleep."

Peter's tensed muscles relaxed just a bit. It was Somebody, then, he thought, relieved. But the voice sounded so very near. Suddenly he sat straight up in bed. Mommie says I talk in my sleep, he thought, I wonder . . .

"Phillip who?" Peter asked the question quickly, then slammed both hands down hard on his mouth.

"*Mumph!*"

Phillip cursed and sputtered, noticing the sudden action too late. But Peter giggled. Here he was scared and it was himself all along. He touched his lips wonderingly. It was like having a playmate inside.

He looked about the room again, this time more confidently. Yes. Everything was the same. Except for the bed, he thought, feeling funny again. It wasn't too long ago that the crib had been taken away. A crib! He'd had enough children to know what they were for!—There. He'd thought something crazy again. If mommie knew, he would get a spanking.

Peter sucked his lip. It was *so* true, he brooded. He'd had two children by Jeannie. Frowning, he shook his head. That was silly. Girls were sissies, everyone knew that. He thought back. Well, what had he meant, then? he wondered. But Phillip pulled the thought away from him in panic. Peter's eyes finally began to close. Only babies played with girls, he thought sleepily. Everyone knew that.

Phillip sighed. The boy was asleep at last. He waited a moment to make sure, then stimulated the optic nerve and stared through Peter's eyes at the quiet child's room. My god, he'd win this time. He'd win no matter what.

He was a nice boy, Phillip mused, this boy he had become. But that was beside the point. It's not that I mind being a child, he told himself for the hundredth time, it's just that I want to retain awareness of myself. Suddenly the thought of Peter filled him with loathing. It was so ridiculous to let a child's mentality supersede his own experienced mind.

And how ironical—he could think with his mind unimpaired, and had to speak with the high-pitched, stut-

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tering voice of a five-year-old. And frightening! More than once Phillip had caught himself thinking in the boy's limited vocabulary. That, he knew, was the first danger signal, the first hint of vanishing identity.

He stared defiantly at the silent room, at the toy box and the teddy bear. This time, he told them, this time things will be different! I'm aware of the pitfalls now, and I'll guard myself carefully. This time, he told them, there will be no steady deterioration of my memories, no insidious infiltration of the child's personality. *Do you hear me?* he whispered. *This time you won't have a chance!*

But it was morning. Peter woke up and ran to the window. It was sunny. He would get out his old cart. He would even let Loren play, if mommie didn't find out. She said Loren told lies.

"Loren tells lies, Loren tells lies." Chanting merrily, he found his socks and tried to put them on.

"Must you act like such an idiot?" The words were out before Phillip could stop himself. He had to stop this sort of thing, he thought. The boy would be a nervous wreck.

Peter dropped his socks. There. He'd heard it again. Idiot. Idiot. He ran into his parents' room, forgetting his shoes and socks.

"Mama," he demanded, "What's an idiot?"

"An idiot is a dumb boy and you are a dumb boy for waking me up at six o'clock in the morning. Go to bed."

Peter held his ground until his mother's slim finger pointed to the door. She's a beauty all right, Phillip thought.

"You're a beauty," Peter said, with sudden inspiration.

His mother's eyes widened and she laughed. "Where did you ever pick that up?" she asked. "You're as bad as your father." But Peter grinned because he knew his mother was pleased. He kissed her and tiptoed to the door, closing it softly behind him.

Phillip smiled to himself; but remembering his own problems, he immediately grew sober, realizing again that he had to find a way to keep his own thoughts away from Peter. He sighed, frightened at the irascibility of his own mood. Twice that week he had grown so horrified at the antics he was forced to endure that he had overwhelmed Peter completely, thrown aside the toys in rage, and sent the teddy bear flying across the room. The tantrum alarmed him all the more because he was aware of the danger of such childishness.

The thread of thought broken for the moment, he watched Peter lift out his assortment of trains from the toy box. He noticed with perverse satisfaction the slight tremble in the boy's hand as he lifted the last car to the small

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track, and forced the childish face into an adult grimace.

If Peter was too young to understand, at least he was also too young to explain matters to his parents, Phillip thought, recalling the boy's last attempt to tell them.

"Mommie," Peter had said, "I'm a big boy, really."

And his mother smiled, brushed back the hair from his forehead. "Of course you are, darling." And Peter had felt such relief because he thought she understood.

But this isn't getting me anywhere. Phillip clenched his fists. *If only I had someone to talk to, some place to write my own ideas* —He stopped suddenly, amazed at the simplicity of the plan that spontaneously made itself clear. And late that night, while Peter slept, Phillip wrote the first entry of the journal that he hoped would preserve his sanity.

April 8—I have finally decided to keep a journal. Although I had thought of the idea before, the obstacles to its fulfillment seemed to render it impractical. Everything considered, however, I feel that the invaluable fruits of such an action more than justify any possible exposure, especially since I have taken steps which render such an event unlikely. And already I feel so much better. It seems so good to use my vocabulary again, to speak, even on paper, in the older accustomed manner.

I do not believe there is any doubt that this manuscript will one day be acclaimed as the only testament of the first human being who proved the disputed theory of reincarnation. Peter and I shall be famous!

Meet it is I set it down, as the tormented Dane justly observes. One must have documentary evidence to confound the materialistic skeptics and the credulous followers of narrow superstitious dogmas, to demonstrate to them what such a man as I can achieve in the way of proof.

For I know too well how all knowledge of past existences is forgotten in the process of new growth, as the old personality merges with the new.

In that—what shall one call it? that time? that space? that life? —in that which exists between existences, I have been aware that I have briefly conquered this law of forgetfulness. I have managed, by severe determination, to maintain my knowledge and memory at the beginning of each succeeding incarnation . . . but even I have been so irresistibly drawn to my new personality that by the age of four or five I have forgotten all else.

This time, however, I shall triumph; and the world shall know to whom it owes this vindication of the despised truth.

Immediately on discovering my rebirth as Peter, I set up a plan of

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action which is designed to assure continued awareness of my self. This plan consists in fighting my own inertia, imposing my will upon Peter's, and refusing, yes refusing, to let his interests touch my own at all. In other words I shall maintain distinct separateness. My enthusiasm for this plan knows no bounds.

The mechanics involved in writing the journal are fairly simple. (I must remember to include all, so that any suspicion of fraud in the future is impossible.) I bide my time until Peter is asleep, then, operating the muscles of his body much as one would manipulate the metal mechanism of a robot, I proceed with due caution to the other side of the room, turn on the small night light and begin work. The toy box serves me as a table. Peter's height makes any other piece of furniture inaccessible. It may surprise you that the boy does not waken, but I have found that while he is sleeping, my control over him is quite complete.

I decided, very cleverly, to write with lemon juice. The script disappears immediately, as you know, and should the parents ever enter the room, they would merely think the boy had walked in his sleep. Is it any wonder I am jubilant over my little plan?

April 9—You have no idea of the problems that confront one in such a position as mine! I must have an audience, someone I can talk to, or I fear for my sanity. The journal is a help, but without any verbal communication I fear I will grow to doubt my own existence. My words here evaporate as quickly as I write them till I imagine that I only dream. And I must do something with Peter. *He must be aware of me as a person!* I exercise my memory daily to further compliment my own ego, but there is *just no one to talk to.*

April 11—Without bragging, I must say that sometimes my ingenuity seems boundless. I hit on a most marvelous plan today—I have become Peter's imaginary companion. I talk to him regularly now, and his parents merely suppose that the boy has fallen prey to one of those amusing childish foibles of which one frequently hears. Indeed, it is not unusual for children to conjure up such imagined playmates. Note for thought: have others, also, discovered the true nature of things, and hit upon this very same plan? If so, what was their fate?

April 13—I spent all afternoon playing with trains—of all things. Since trains never interested me—except for a slight curiosity with their wheels—I was in no danger; still it was not a good idea. Peter can be a most annoying little monster, however. He insisted on visiting some of his playmates today, a venture of which I strongly

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disapproved. I cannot, at this time, risk any unwarranted outside influence, and an argument ensued until he finally agreed to stay home in return for my promise to play trains. You can imagine my pique.

April 19—It is hard to find time to write now—Peter keeps me so busy. His father took us to the lake today, and my mind was alive with nostalgic memories of similar incidents in past lives. But my struggle is so fatiguing, and there was something in father's voice that aroused in me the deepest panic! There is a small incident that frightened me considerably:

I must have said something earlier in the day to startle Peter, for his mind was worried. It was while we stood by the lake that he looked up at his father and asked him if his name was really Peter. His father, amused at the earnestness of the boy's face, laughed and assured him that such was the case. My heart sank within me. Here, for the first time, Peter began to get a hint that he and I were one, and the father, by his jesting manner, made Peter feel that it was ridiculous to suppose he was anyone else—but that he was Peter and Peter alone.

But the worst part is that I myself was almost convinced, if only for a brief moment! It was then that I heard in my mind the same reasonable tone of countless other parents who had made me forget. This sort of insidiousness must be guarded against. It is not to be borne! *I shall forget nothing.*

April 20—Father has promised—Peter's father, I mean, has promised the boy a new cart for his birthday and Peter is already annoying me with demands that I pull it for him when it arrives! Can you imagine a more ludicrous situation—a man of my learning involved in pulling a child's wagon around the block! The results of such foolhardiness could be disastrous were I so inclined—which, I assure you, I am not. The fact is, I am resolved to use the greatest caution when the cart arrives, since the smallest pull in my character toward such things can be dangerous—and as a child I was always fascinated by wheeled toys. It seems that a set of child's books would be a more appropriate gift for the boy in any case.

April 22—Peter grows impatient to visit his playmates, and with such fine weather setting in, I am afraid I shall have to give in. I dislike the prospect of spending hours at a time with a group of youngsters, but I fear even more the impending birthday party and the presentation of the wagon. Peter will be six, however, and this also adds to the burden of my thoughts, since I have never maintained control this long before. I consider this an achievement . . . and I find myself filled with doubts.

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April 29—Do you know, I forgot the journal completely? My days have been so fully spent that at night I am too exhausted to do anything but sleep. Tonight, however, after tossing restlessly and falling into an uneasy slumber, I awoke suddenly, bathed in a cold sweat. Peter was dreaming—or rather *I had become Peter* and my mind had been dreaming *Peter's dream*. Imagine my terror! In the dream I was playing happily in front of the house with Peter's new wagon. I wrenched myself away from the image, and rushed to the journal. After writing I feel somewhat more calm.

May 10—Today mommie took us to the circus, and I was unaccountably excited by the carnival atmosphere, the carousels, the many-costumed populace. In fact, I was quite thrilled by the unusual activity. I imagine that the event reminded me of other such amusements in other lives, though at the present I can think of none. My struggle takes so much of my energy that I find that many details quite escape me.

May 22—Yesterday we didn't do nothing. I mean—Yesterday we didn't do anything. *Why, oh why am I so weary?* Why is it so difficult to construct a simple sentence? I think I need rest.

May 28—I forgot the jornel intierly. But its spring and we got so much to do. Theres a bunch of us that play and I stay up later cause it dont get dark so soon. And I tell the kids about the wagen Im gona get.

May 29—God help me! I just read my last entry and the terror that filled me as I realized its significance was almost too much to bear. I might never have realized what had happened had my mood not been so black this evening that I felt an overwhelming desire to seek relief by reading some of the words that I myself had written. My hand trembled as I held the paper up to the light, and then to see those tragic words leap up at me . . . Perhaps the crisis is past now. I shall take the greatest care from now on. And I will reread each entry.

June 3—Peter continually nags me to find out if he really will get a new wagon. Finally in anger I told him that I hoped he never got one, and that if he did, I never wanted to see it. He immediately burst into tears. Perhaps I was too severe, but this foolish toy has gained some evil significance for me and I think of it only with dread. Peter's thoughts are filled with nothing else and I turn my own mind away only by the strongest exercise of my will power.

June 7—It was intolerably warm today. We played outside with no sweaters. I mean Peter did.

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June 10—Odd that I resented Peter's getting a wagon. Actually I have always been partial to them myself, and look foreward to his receiving it.

June 13—I am so weery. Sometimes I am chased by doubts but I read over what I wrote and don't see anything wrong. What is it I have forgot?

June 14—My birthday is soon. I should be glad. I will be six. Wrong. Peter will. I am afraid. Maybe cause so many grownups will come. They chase boys with wagens.

June 16—The party is day after tomorro. I don't want to go. Mommie says I have to. I do so want to go.

June 17—I'm dreaming I guess cause Im riting and I cant yet. I can print tho. I print my name good but its hard to make letters. I didnt want to get out of bed but something made me. I got back but it made me get up agin. I heer somebody cry but I dont see nobody. My hands is tired.

JuNe 18———I goT *a* Red wageN. It is reD. peTer

Coming Next Month

The treasure of our January issue, on the stands around November 29, is *Wilderness,* the latest and possibly the most moving and exciting of Zenna Henderson's novelets of The People. The issue will also feature a Poul Anderson novelet, set in the same scientific-magic future as the popular *Operation Afreet,* plus more of Arthur C. Clarke's glimpses of the moon and some special Christmas features: a singular tale of psychological and sexual horror in the purchase of Christmas trees, by Mildred Clingerman, and, in the great old English tradition, a brace of Christmas ghost stories to read by a roaring fire: a lost and forgotten story by Sheridan Le Fanu to represent the older tradition, and a completely modern chiller by John Dickson Carr.

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The Science Screen

by CHARLES BEAUMONT

IT WAS AN UNUSUALLY GUSTY DAY for California in that Spring of 1952, but I didn't question the wind. Nor would I have questioned a sky gone suddenly black with the flight of bats, in thousands, quarking dire alarms; or a stillness upon the streets, broken only by an occasional far-off scream; or even angry mobs of villagers bearing heavy knobkerries sharpened to points. These things would have frightened me, but I would not have questioned them. For I was on my way to see Count Dracula.

My agent of that period had telephoned me at 3:00 A.M. with the news that one of my stories had been read with enthusiasm by Bela Lugosi. The actor had begun the yarn in the midnight hours (as when else?) and had immediately contacted the agent. Would it be possible, he wondered, for the author to pay him a personal call, to discuss terms? And . . . would Mr. Beaumont please come alone? —he disliked crowds; they made him jumpy.

Not wishing to make Mr. Lugosi jumpy, I agreed on both counts, and soon found myself trudging through odd hillside streets toward an unfamiliar address. With each step, the years seemed to peel away. I began to resurrect long-buried memories. Lugosi as the paranoiac commander of a school of blind men; Lugosi as Baron von Frankenstein's hunchbacked assistant, torturing the helpless Monster; then, later, becoming this Monster and being tortured by others; a hundred flash recollections of Lugosi stabbing and throttling and smothering, and biting, walking the screens as the personification of all the goblin evils that ever were; and, finally, in his royal cloak and deathly pallor, Lugosi as the greatest fiend of them all.

As I checked the numbers off the apartment houses and knew I was coming close, it occurred to me that here was the Compleat Bogeyman. Karloff was, perhaps, a better actor, and so were Rathbone and Lorre, but we had seen them all with their horror-masks off. We knew they were human beings. Karloff had edited fine anthologies of supernatural stories (AND THE DARKNESS FALLS, TALES OF TERROR), so brilliantly done that one could no longer think of him as a *bona*

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fide monster—he had even sunk to reading comics over the radio to children; and Lorre and Rathbone, tiring of grue, had returned to straight roles—to the vast disappointment of such horror-addicts as myself.

Lugosi, however, remained true to the cause. His roles were invariably grotesque, and even (as in THE BODY SNATCHER) when he might have played it "straight," he chose otherwise.

He was a bat, a corpse, a cripple, a creature, a cheat, a thief, a murderer, an animal, a mad professor; but he was never, never a normal human being.

Thus having worked myself up and expecting a Transylvanian castle or, at the very least, a shabby, time-gnarled house, I was somewhat surprised to discover a California-style apartment unit, all chrome and pink plaster and dichondra. There was, I'm afraid, a swimming pool, but it had no water in it, and that was encouraging.

I stood for a delicious moment, feeling a bit like Dwight Fry and a bit like the boy who saw ISLAND OF LOST SOULS and went home and could not sleep for two nights; then I knocked.

Count Dracula opened the door. He was very old and weak, his flesh was parchmented, and he held a cigar in his left hand; but it was *he*, unmistakably.

"You are Mister Beaumont?" he asked; and his voice was as rich and alien as ever, his smile as darkly inviting.

I shook his hand and went inside. The apartment was in chaos. It was full of trunks and mismatched furniture and rugs and curios.

"I have read your story, Mister Beaumont. I want to come back to the screen, in the role of your devil."

I'd forgotten that Mr. Lugosi had not appeared in a film for many years. I told him I would be very proud of the distinction.

He leaned forward. "You have seen my movies?"

"All of them," I said. "Some of them three and four times."

"Indeed?"

He put the cigar in his mouth and grinned happily. Then he gestured toward the wall. It was covered by a gigantic painting. "That is myself," he said, "as Count Dracula."

It was a surprisingly good painting, unsigned, beginning to crack. It portrayed Lugosi as a young man, clad in the familiar evening suit and cloak. He was handsome and lithe and every inch a vampire.

He laughed. "Myself." He shook his head and began to reminisce, speaking only of his tours with Dracula, what the role meant to him, how he had come to associate himself with the character.

"I made a great deal of money in those days," he said. "But now I do not have any money. In fact,

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I am looking for someone to share this apartment with me. Not because of the money. Because I am lonely."

I thought of sleeping in the same apartment with Bela Lugosi, particularly with the moon full, and the night windy. . . .

"About your story," he said, and we began to talk business. It evolved that he could not pay me but that if we went to a certain studio, now, we could undoubtedly raise the cash. "The producer there," he said, "worked on many pictures with me. He is a friend. He will give us the cash."

We got into my car—an ancient Lincoln—and started toward the studio. Lugosi dreamed aloud. "With this part, I will be number one again," he said. "I know it." He fell silent and remained so until a small dog leapt in front of the automobile; then he sat forward and shouted, "Be careful, you idiot. Be careful!"

I swerved, and we missed the dog, and Lugosi patted his forehead with a handkerchief. I slowed to twenty.

"Listen," he said, and snorted. "Listen: right after *Dracula,* they called me and asked me did I wish to play in a picture called *Frankenstein.* When they told me about the part, I said: 'I am a star. I will not take a part without dialogue!' So I called a friend of mine in New York. He was starving. I told him the part was nothing, but perhaps he would make a little money. He came to Hollywood. He made the picture. Now Boris Karloff is on top and I am on the bottom. It is very funny."

I didn't think it was very funny, and I don't believe he did either. We stopped at the studio and Lugosi got out of the car.

I waited for an hour; then he came back, looking tired.

"He will not give us any money," he said. "Please take me home."

I took him home. He thanked me for my trouble, apologized for the inconvenience, and pressed my hand. I went away.

I knew nothing of his addiction to narcotics at that time, nor did I have any hint of his marital difficulties. I only knew that, for me, Dracula was finally dead, and in his place was a sick, friendless, lonely old man. . . .

The old man made one final appearance, in the film THE BLACK SLEEP (*see below*); then, on the seventeenth of August of this year, he, too, died.

His last wish was that his famous black cloak be draped across his body and buried with him. This was done.

[*The editing of fantasy is an eerie profession, not recommended to the weakhearted.*

I received Mr. Beaumont's column while traveling, and first read his obituary tribute to the great

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vampire in a smoker of the New York, New Haven & Hartford, which is spiritually about as far as one can get from dank and dangerous Transylvanian castles. I took it back to my hotel room to ready it for the printer.

It was shortly past midnight, nine days after the death of Dracula. And down the corridor of one of New York's largest hotels, passing and repassing the door of my room, there swooped and fluttered a bat. . . .]

Among the new films, SATELLITE IN THE SKY (Warner Brothers Release) is notable for two reasons: 1. It is incredibly bad, and 2. J. T. McIntosh is listed among the scenarists.

There was a time when I would have asked, "How in the name of integrity could a writer like McIntosh get himself mixed up with a dog like this?" But now I realize the foolishness of the question. One does not, after all, blame the architect if one's house has rats.

This one has plenty. Along with the termites, they have gnawed away everything worthwhile, leaving only the foundation—which is sound, if unoriginal—and a few tasteless props.

The plot, if SATELLITE IN THE SKY may be said to have one, concerns the first flight beyond the stratosphere. A standard crew is assigned to the ship—the Captain, the beautiful stowaway, the Professor, etc.—and, after three or four agonizingly earth-bound reels, we blast away. Then we discover that the real purpose of the junket is to explode the World's Most Powerful Atom Bomb. Unfortunately the bomb, once released in space, attaches itself to the ship, refusing to be dislodged. This situation should make for suspense, but it doesn't, and the safe explosion, four reels later, comes as a thumping anticlimax.

Edward J. and Harry Lee Danziger, who were jointly responsible for DEVIL GIRL OF MARS, produced, and Paul Dickson, may God forgive him, directed. The writers, in addition to McIntosh, were John Mather and Edith Dell. Together, they managed to cook up the most stilted, improbable, dull dialogue imaginable.

For reasons not too difficult to understand, the actors—Kieron Moore, Lois Maxwell, Donald Wolfit and Barry Keegan—chose to swallow their lines.

When the British do a bad job, it's really bad.

Strange to say, EARTH VS. THE FLYING SAUCERS (Columbia), for all that it is an absurd picture, is infinitely more bearable than the foregoing. Good old George Worthington Yates, in collaboration with Raymond Marcus, has served us up some very palatable corn; and once you understand the motives of the writers, you settle back and have a small ball.

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It is the same WAR OF THE WORLDS gook, needless to point out: Flying saucers, manned by super-creatures, attack earth and are defeated at the last moment by an intrepid scientist with his brand new anti-flying-saucer Zap cannon. But forget that (if you can). For, unlike similar peanut-budget s.f. movies, EARTH VS. THE FLYING SAUCERS doesn't take itself in the least seriously, and so manages to be a lot of fun.

Ray Harryhausen's special effects are excellent and quite exciting, considering the budget limitations under which he was forced to work. The destruction of the Washington monument and of the Capitol building are particularly impressive, though it must be said that the Deadly Weapon we earthmen invent in the nick of time doesn't look as if it could stun a young horsefly. I believe Alexander Calder designed it.

Hugh Marlowe's acting is adequate, Joan Taylor is nice to look at, and the spear-carriers carry their spears.

Viva Sam Katzman!

On second thought, bad cess to Sam Katzman. His THE WEREWOLF (Columbia), after a brilliant opening, descends to depths of idiocy undreamed of. The Werewolf, a time honored creature, feared and respected to this day, is here dressed up in modern garb, and the effect is disheartening. It is like seeing Frankenstein's monster in a zoot suit or Vampira in a pinafore. Steven Ritch, who gets the "and-introducing" treatment, takes the part of a poor jasper who falls into the hands of not one, but two mad scientists. These visionaries have been experimenting on animals, in preparation for the Great Atomic War—when mere men will not survive. Ritch gets a dose of "isotopically triggered" medicine and promptly becomes a wolf-man. He escapes the laboratory and wanders into a small town, where he proceeds to wreak bloody havoc. After a few murders, he is tracked down by stalwart Sheriff Don McGowan; and, since he is not an evil creature but rather a poor sick fellow and father of a fine boy, he is, naturally, shot to death by the posse. The Sheriff's attitude seems to be, Werewolves are all right in their place, but would you want one to marry your sister?

Ritch is unquestionably the sweatiest, most nervous actor to come along since Orson Welles played Macbeth, but I'm not sure, as the producers evidently are, that this is any positive indication of greatness.

THE BLACK SLEEP (Bel-Air Prod.) is a horror in every sense of the word. Basil Rathbone struggles gamely with the ludicrous and heavy-handed plot—devised solely in order to give parts to as many professional shudder-men as possible—but he doesn't succeed in saving this ill-starred freak show.

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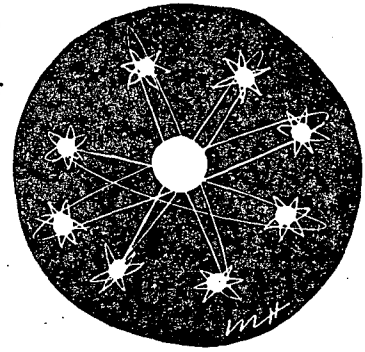

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The truly great leader takes his strength from something outside of himself—something which he receives, ingests and makes a part of his own being. This was true even in the dawn days of pre-history, as we may learn by the example of

The Apotheosis of Ki

by MIRIAM ALLEN DEFORD

KI BECAME A MIGHTY MEDICINE MAN because he encountered a god and the god entered into him.

He was hunting alone; there were no longer enough young strong men in the tribe to hunt in groups. Every year the snow came farther south. Where his father had killed horses and bison still, there roamed the woolly mammoth and the reindeer. Of animals that one man can attack, few were left, and often the people were hard put to it to subsist on the grubs and eggs, the roots and berries and nuts, gathered by the women in the summer and put by. For more and more of the year, there was no living except in the caves, and a fire had to be kept going constantly outside, for comfort as well as for protection.

Ki found himself now crossing a wide plain he knew well. Once it had been a prized and precious hunting-ground; now he had searched for hours and found no living creature but himself. His heart was low within him, and in despair he glanced upward into the sky for help.

And then suddenly there was a noise like innumerable thunderbolts, and a flash like innumerable lightning-darts, so that he threw himself on the ground to hide his eyes. In the very midst of the plain something shaped like a giant egg had crashed to earth and burst into flames.

Dazed, Ki stood up and gaped at it. A crack in it opened and . . . somebody? something? crawled out and ran toward him, away from the blaze.

It was like a human being in shape, but vastly tall—taller even than the Terrible Men from the Sunrise before whom Ki's own people fled in fear. Instead of the

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fur or hide garments which men wear, he (it was male from its contours) was clad in some unknown material that was smooth and shiny, and around his head, resting on his shoulders, was a globular object that threw back glints from the winter sun, as if it were a giant misformed icicle. Then the being reached up and drew this from him, and his face was no human face, not even the weird unholy face of the Terrible Men. There were no ridges at all above the brow, but only a high pale dome; the chin, instead of retreating as does a man's, thrust outward; and the eyes, Ki saw, awed, were the color of river water.

Then Ki knew it was a god—though whether Akku of the Sky or Ber the Fire God or Hegag the God of Storms it was not given to mortal man to guess. Ki sank trembling to his knees, and the god walked nearer to him, and spoke. His voice was like the voice of wind in the trees, and Ki understood not a word he said. But Ki spoke also, if in no answer.

"O great god," he cried, "you have come! You have come as our fathers foretold to us, as our shaman promised us before he died and left us with no medicine man to mediate for us. You have come to help the tribe of Ki-ya, lest the young men die off beneath the cold, and the women and children starve in the caves, and the mighty and glorious people cease to be."

But the god stood and shook his strange head, and Ki understood then that the gods do not speak the language of men, any more than men can speak the language of the gods.

Yet still it seemed to him, as he knelt trembling in his worn furs that had been his father's and his father's father's, that in some manner beyond speech the god comprehended what he had said. For he raised an arm and pointed above him.

And Ki went on speaking to the god in his own tongue, which was the only tongue he knew.

"I see now that you are Akku of the Sky," he said. "Or if not Akku himself, then one from among his sons. I hear and obey, great god. Tell me now how we shall find sufficient food, so that we may live and grow strong again as once we were."

And as if he had known the meaning of the word *food,* the god opened his own mouth and pointed to it with his finger, and then pointed to his belly, where men feel hunger.

But gods do not eat and do not hunger, so Ki understood that it was he and his tribe whose need to eat was known to the god.

"True, but how?" Ki persisted. And the god gestured further. He swayed on his long legs like a man weak from fasting, and closed his eyes, and staggered as if he would fall.

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And all the while the huge egg which had fallen from the sky and from which the god had emerged continued to blaze and crackle as if something more than wood fed it, though it is well known that only wood can burn.

"I am but a poor weak mortal," Ki pleaded desperately, "and the thoughts of the gods are too far beyond my thoughts. If it be your will, give me to understand how it is that our help is to come from you, and what I must do to carry out your commands."

Then with a stab of anguish it came to him that the god had meant by his pantomime that only by sacrifice could the tribe be saved, and that he desired Ki to lie down in the snow and die, as the god had feigned a man's doing.

Ki was a man full-grown; sixteen times the winter had come since he was a bawling infant at his mother's breast. But he was young still, and the juice and protest of youth were in him. Through his mind flashed thronging memories —memories of a child at play with his brothers, memories of the good years when the tribe had been strong and had feasted, memories of women he had had and of women he had wanted.

When men die, they sleep, the old medicine man had told them— all his class of boys gathered in the forest to be readied for their initiation. This was one of the mysteries that women and children must never hear. They sleep, and we lay them under the earth on a bed of branches, or in a dark inner corner of a cave, with flint flakes for their pillow. And around them we lay their weapons and tools, and the bones of the animals we have burnt and eaten in their honor so that when at last they awaken—and only the gods can know when that will be—they may have near at hand weapons to defend themselves, and the reminders of sacrifice with which to uphold their dignity.

And Ki reflected that now the tribe had so fallen away that even the mightiest warriors and hunters died, and there were no animals to sacrifice to them. More still: when children died, or old women— great-grandmothers who had seen the changes of forty years or more— and even old men who left no descendants to fight for them, instead of being sacrificed to, they themselves became perforce their own sacrifice; and the tribe stilled its hunger by feeding on its own, so that only the bones were left to bury—and those blackened by fire and split to obtain the marrow and smeared with red earth so that when the dead awakened they might think the blood still ran through them. Worse: these two years past, only those who had been killed by beasts or by the Terrible Men from the Sunrise (for they no longer had warriors enough to raid other tribes of their own kind) still

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were taboo and must be buried as they fell.

That taboo had been ordained before the old medicine man felt himself close to death by some poison or ill-thinking—as death always comes that is not by direct killing. Ki remembered how one night around the fire the shaman had said, "This is the law which the people must obey even if they perish. For if even those killed by beasts or men were not taboo, then men would slay their own fellowmen of the tribe, only to feed on them." So he saw to it, when some evil-wisher from some other tribe had put weakness into his own body, that a young man of the tribe should strike him with his cudgel until he fell. It was done in full assembly before them all, that men might know it was by the shaman's own will, and the slayer be innocent.

It was Ki himself who had been chosen for that rite. It was the very cudgel he carried now, in sight of the god, with which he had done the deed.

All these things Ki remembered, and his heart did not wish to die. Least of all to die here, alone before the god. Who then of all the people would know of his sacrifice? Who would ever come to bury his body, and to know that it was worthy of honor?

But man is as nothing before the will of the gods, who rule breath and light and warmth and all that men must have, and rule also the wicked complaints and rebellions of the hearts of men.

So he rose and stood before the god and said, "If this be your will, I am ready. Slay me that the tribe may grow strong again."

But the god did not move to strike him. He had indeed in his hand, as Ki saw now, something, of some unknown divine shape and nature, too small for a cudgel and too large for a hand-ax, that might serve him as a weapon. But he did not raise it; instead he cast it from him, and let it lie where it fell in the snow, and he came nearer to Ki and held out his empty hands; and then once more he pointed to his mouth and to his belly. And he spoke again, in his tongue that no man could understand; and in his tone, had he been a man and not a god, was what would have seemed a note of pleading.

And Ki trembled, trying beyond his power of thought to comprehend.

And the god pointed again upward to the sky, and then to himself, and then, turning, to the sunrise and the sunset, and to the north and last to the south. And his voice was a question, asked with resignation but with the shadow of hope.

And so at last Ki understood.

With his cudgel he struck the god full on the head, and the god fell. And Ki struck him again and again until he lay still and his blood was on the snow.

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Then he cast the dead god on the flames that still rose from the burning egg, and when the holy flesh was roasted he drew it forth, and when it was cool he hung it by a thong across his shoulders.

But first he ate the heart.

Before the sun was low in the sky, he reached the cave, and he threw his burden down before him as they came crowding out to see.

"Here is food," he said. "It is the body of a god, of a son of Akku of the Sky, who died that the people might live.

"And I have eaten his heart, and the god has entered into me and given me wisdom. Now I shall be your medicine man, and I shall guide you and teach you, and while you obey me I shall lead you to good hunting grounds, so that the people may wax fat again, and be many, as they once were, and be strong. And with tomorrow's sun, with the vigor that this meat will give us, we shall turn southward, for that is the last direction in which the god pointed.

"All this the god told me without words, before he commanded me to strike him dead. And if any doubt me, let him go to the plain beyond the dark forest, and he will find there what fire has left of a huge and monstrous egg, in which the god rode down from the sky, and appeared before me, Ki, to ransom and redeem the tribe of Ki-ya."

And two young men who did not believe went as he commanded, and found that it was so. And they ate of the sacrifice, and at the next dawn they traveled southward.

Thus it was that Ki became a mighty medicine man. The god had entered into him, and he was as a god. And far to the south, where the snow and ice had not yet come, the tribe found good hunting, so that they grew strong again, and many children were born and did not die, and the tribe of Ki-ya raided and slew their enemies of many other tribes, and so became great once more upon the earth.

That all this is true, is certain. For it was not until Ki had grown weak and very old—nearly fifty years still alive in the world—and his son's son, who envied him his wealth of flint and furs and women and meat and power, had cleft open his head with a stone ax and slain him, that the tribe of Ki-ya was overwhelmed and destroyed by a wandering horde of the Terrible Men from the Sunrise.

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Arthur C. Clarke, poet, realist and humorist of science fiction and fact, has come up with something unparalleled even in his versatile career; a series of six brief episodes from the first moon-flight, which delightfully combine the detailed and evocative factuality of his PRELUDE TO SPACE *with the anecdotal entertainment of his tall tales of the "White Hart" tavern. Here are the first two in the series — stories to make you smile even while they convey the unarguable feeling of "This is what it will be like."*

Venture to the Moon

by ARTHUR C. CLARKE

I: THE STARTING LINE

THE STORY OF THE FIRST LUNAR EXpedition has been written so many times that some people will doubt if there is anything fresh to be said about it. Yet all the official reports and eyewitness accounts, the on-the-spot recordings and broadcasts never, in my opinion, gave the full picture. They said a great deal about the discoveries that were made—but very little about the men who made them.

As captain of the *Endeavour* and thus commander of the British party, I was able to observe a good many things you will not find in the history books, and some (though not all) of them can now be told. One day, I hope, my opposite numbers on the *Goddard* and the *Ziolkovski* will give their points of view. But as Commander Vandenburg is still on Mars and Commander Krasnin is somewhere inside the orbit of Venus, it looks as if we will have to wait a few more years for *their* memoirs.

Confession, it is said, is good for the soul. I shall certainly feel much happier when I have told the true story behind the timing of the first lunar flight, about which there has always been a good deal of mystery.

As everyone knows, the American, Russian and British ships were assembled in the orbit of Space Station Three, five hundred miles above the Earth, from components flown up by relays of freight rockets. Though all the parts had been prefabricated, the assembly and testing of the ships took over two

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years, by which time a great many people—who did not realise the complexity of the task—were beginning to get slightly impatient. They had seen dozens of photos and telecasts of the three ships floating there in space beside Station Three, apparently quite complete and ready to pull away from Earth at a moment's notice. What the pictures didn't show was the careful and tedious work still in progress as thousands of pipes, wires, motors and instruments were fitted and subjected to every conceivable test.

There was no definite target-date for departure; since the Moon is always at approximately the same distance, you can leave for it at almost any time you like . . . once you are ready. It makes practically no difference, from the point of view of fuel consumption, if you blast off at full moon or new moon or at any time in between. We were very careful to make no predictions about blast-off, though everyone was always trying to get us to fix the time. So many things can go wrong in a spaceship, and we were not going to say good-bye to Earth until we were ready down to the last detail.

I shall always remember the last Commanders' conference, aboard the Space Station, when we all announced that we were ready. Since it was a cooperative venture, each party specialising in some particular task, it had been agreed that we should all make our landings within the same 24-hour period, on the preselected site in the Mare Imbrium. The details of the journey, however, had been left to the individual commanders, presumably in the hope that we would not copy each other's mistakes.

"I'll be ready," said Commander Vandenburg, "to make my first dummy takeoff at 0900 tomorrow. What about you, gentlemen? Shall we ask Earth Control to stand by for all three of us?"

"That's OK by me," said Krasnin, who could never be convinced that his American slang was twenty years out of date.

I nodded my agreement. It was true that one bank of fuel gauges was still misbehaving, but that didn't really matter; they would be fixed by the time the tanks were filled.

The dummy run consisted of an exact replica of a real blast-off, with everyone carrying out the job he would do when the time came for the genuine thing. We had practised, of course, in mock-ups down on Earth, but this was a perfect imitation of what would happen to us when we finally took off for the Moon. All that was missing was the roar of the motors that would tell us that the voyage had begun.

We did six complete imitations of blast-off, took the ships to pieces to eliminate anything that hadn't behaved perfectly, then did six

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more. The *Endeavour*, the *Goddard* and the *Ziolkovski* were all in the same state of serviceability. It now only remained to fuel up, and we would be ready to leave.

The suspense of those last few hours is not something I would care to go through again. The eyes of the world were upon us; departure time had now been set, with an uncertainty of only a few hours. All the final tests had been made and we were convinced that our ships were as ready as humanly possible.

It was then that I had an urgent and secret personal radio call from a very high official indeed, and a suggestion was made which had so much authority behind it that there was little point in pretending that it wasn't an order. The first flight to the Moon, I was reminded, was a cooperative venture—but think of the prestige if *we* got there first. It need only be by a couple of hours. . . .

I was shocked at the suggestion, and said so. By this time Vandenburg and Krasnin were good friends of mine and we were all in this together. I made every excuse I could and said that since our flight-paths had been already computed there wasn't anything that could be done about it. Each ship was making the journey by the most economical route, to conserve fuel. If we started together, we would arrive together, within seconds.

Unfortunately, someone had thought of the answer to that. Our three ships, fuelled up and with their crews standing by, would be circling Earth in a state of complete readiness for several hours before they actually pulled away from their satellite orbits and headed out to the Moon. At our 500-mile altitude, we took 95 minutes to make one circuit of the Earth, and only once every revolution would the moment be ripe to begin the voyage. If we could jump the gun by one revolution, the others would have to wait that 95 minutes before they could follow. And so they would land on the Moon 95 minutes behind us. . . .

I won't go into the arguments, and I'm still a little ashamed that I yielded and agreed to deceive my two colleagues. We were in the shadow of Earth, in momentary eclipse, when the carefully calculated moment came. Vandenburg and Krasnin, honest fellows, thought I was going to make one more round-trip with them before we all set off together. I have seldom felt a bigger heel in my life than when I pressed the firing key and felt the sudden thrust of the motors as they swept me away from my mother world.

For the next ten minutes we had no time for anything but our instruments, as we checked that the *Endeavour* was forging ahead along her precomputed orbit. Al-

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most at the moment that we finally escaped from Earth and could cut the motors, we burst out of shadow into the full blaze of the sun. There would be no more night until we reached the Moon, after five days of effortless and silent coasting through space.

Already Space Station Three and the two other ships must be a thousand miles behind. In 85 more minutes Vandenburg and Krasnin would be back at the correct starting point and could take off after me, as we had all planned. But they could never overcome my lead, and I hoped they wouldn't be too mad at me when we met again on the Moon.

I switched on the rear camera and looked back at the distant gleam of the Space Station, just emerging from the shadow of Earth. It was some moments before I realised that the *Goddard* and the *Ziolkovski* weren't still floating beside it where I'd left them.

No; they were just half a mile away, neatly matching my velocity. I stared at them in utter disbelief for a second, before I realised that every one of us had had the same idea. "Why, you pair of double-crossers!" I gasped. Then I began to laugh so much that it was several minutes before I dared call up a very worried Earth Control and tell them that everything had gone according to plan. Though in no case was it the plan that had been originally announced. . . .

We were all very sheepish when we radioed each other to exchange mutual congratulations. Yet at the same time, I think everyone was secretly pleased that it had turned out this way. For the rest of the trip, we were never more than a few miles apart, and the actual landing manoeuvres were so well synchronised that our three braking jets hit the Moon simultaneously.

Well, almost simultaneously. I might make something of the fact that the recorder tape shows I touched down two-fifths of a second ahead of Krasnin. But I'd better not, for Vandenburg was the same amount ahead of me.

On a quarter of a million mile trip, I think you could call that a photo finish.

II: ROBIN HOOD, F.R.S.

WE HAD LANDED EARLY IN THE DAWN of the long lunar day, and the slanting shadows lay all around us, extending for miles across the plain. They would slowly shorten as the sun rose higher in the sky until at noon they had almost vanished—but noon was still five days away as we measured time on Earth, and nightfall was seven days later still. We had almost two weeks of daylight ahead of us be-

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fore the sun set and the bluely gleaming Earth became the mistress of the sky.

There was little time for exploration during those first hectic days. We had to unload the ships, grow accustomed to the alien conditions surrounding us, learn to handle our electrically powered tractors and scooters, and erect the igloos which would serve as homes, offices and labs until the time came to leave. At a pinch, we could live in the spaceships, but it would be excessively uncomfortable and cramped. The igloos were not exactly commodious, but they were luxury after five days in space. Made of tough, flexible plastic, they were blown up like balloons and their interiors were then partitioned into separate rooms. Airlocks allowed access to the outer world, and a good deal of plumbing linked to the ships' air-purification plants kept the atmosphere breathable. Needless to say, the American igloo was the biggest one, and had come complete with everything *including* the kitchen sink. Not to mention a washing machine which we and the Russians were always borrowing.

It was late in the "afternoon"—about ten days after we had landed—before we were properly organised and could think about serious scientific work. The first parties made nervous little forays out into the wilderness around the base, familiarising themselves with the territory. Of course, we already possessed minutely detailed maps and photographs of the region in which we had landed, but it was surprising how misleading they could sometimes be. What had been marked as a small hill on a chart often looked like a mountain to a man toiling along in a spacesuit, and apparently smooth plains were often covered knee-deep with dust which made progress extremely slow and tedious.

These were minor difficulties, however, and the low gravity, which gave all objects only a sixth of their terrestrial weight, compensated for much. As the scientists began to accumulate their results and specimens, the radio and TV circuits with Earth became busier and busier, until they were in continuous operation. We were taking no chances; even if *we* didn't get home, the knowledge we were gathering would do so.

The first of the automatic supply rockets landed two days before sunset, precisely according to plan. We saw its braking jets flame briefly against the stars, then blast again a few seconds before touchdown. The actual landing was hidden from us since for safety reasons the dropping ground was three miles from Base. And on the Moon, three miles is well over the curve of the horizon.

When we got to the robot, it was standing slightly askew on its tripod shock-absorbers, but in per-

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fect condition. So was everything aboard it, from instruments to food. We carried the stores back to Base in triumph, and had a celebration that was really rather overdue. The men had been working too hard, and could do with some relaxation.

It was quite a party; the highlight, I think, was Commander Krasnin trying to do a Cossack dance in a spacesuit. Then we turned our minds to competitive sports, but found that, for obvious reasons, outdoor activities were somewhat restricted. Games like croquet or bowls would have been practical had we the equipment; but cricket and football were definitely out. In this gravity, even a football would go half a mile if it were given a good kick—and a cricket ball would never be seen again.

Professor Trevor Williams was the first person to think of a practical lunar sport. He was our astronomer, and also one of the youngest men ever to be made a Fellow of the Royal Society, being only thirty when this ultimate accolade was conferred upon him. His work on methods of interplanetary navigation had made him world-famous; less well-known, however, was his skill as a toxophilist. For two years in succession he had been archery champion for Wales; I was not surprised, therefore, when I discovered him shooting at a target propped up on a pile of lunar slag.

The bow was a curious one, strung with steel control wire and shaped from a laminated plastic bar. I wondered where Trevor had got hold of it, then remembered that the robot freight rocket had now been cannibalised and bits of it were appearing in all sorts of unexpected places. The arrows, however, were the really interesting feature. To give them stability on the airless Moon, where of course feathers would be useless, Trevor had managed to rifle them. There was a little gadget on the bow that set them spinning, like bullets, when they were fired, so that they kept on course when they left the bow.

Even with this rather makeshift equipment, it was possible to shoot a mile if one wished to. However, Trevor didn't want to waste arrows, which were not easy to make; he was more interested in seeing the sort of accuracy he could get. It was uncanny to watch the almost flat trajectory of the arrows: they seemed to be travelling parallel to the ground. If he wasn't careful, someone warned Trevor, his arrows might become lunar satellites and would hit him in the back when they completed their orbit.

The second supply rocket arrived the next day, but this time things didn't go according to plan. It made a perfect touchdown, but unfortunately the radar-controlled

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automatic pilot made one of those mistakes which such simple-minded machines delight in doing. It spotted the only really unclimbable hill in the neighbourhood, locked its beam on to the summit of it, and settled down there like an eagle coming descending upon its mountain eyrie.

Our badly needed supplies were five hundred feet above our heads, and in a few hours night would be falling. What was to be done?

About fifteen people made the same suggestion at once, and for the next few minutes there was a great scurrying about as we rounded up all the nylon line on the Base. Soon there was more than a thousand yards of it coiled in neat loops at Trevor's feet while we all waited expectantly. He tied one end to his arrow, drew the bow, and aimed it experimentally straight towards the stars. The arrow rose a little more than half the height of the cliff; then the weight of the line pulled it back.

"Sorry," said Trevor. "I just can't make it. And don't forget—we'd have to send up some kind of grapnel as well if we want the end to stay up there."

There was much gloom for the next few minutes, as we watched the coils of line fall slowly back from the sky. The situation was really somewhat absurd. In our ships we had enough energy to carry us a quarter of a million miles from the Moon—yet we were baffled by a puny cliff. If we had time, we could probably find a way up to the top from the other side of the hill, but that would mean travelling several miles. It would be dangerous, and might well be impossible, during the few hours of daylight that were left.

Scientists are never baffled for long, and too many ingenious (sometimes over-ingenious) minds were working on the problem for it to remain unresolved. But this time it was a little more difficult, and only three people got the answer simultaneously. Trevor thought it over, then said non-committally, "Well, it's worth trying."

The preparations took a little while, and we were all watching anxiously as the rays of the sinking sun crept higher and higher up the sheer cliff looming above us. Even if Trevor could get a line and grapnel up there, I thought to myself, it would not be easy making the ascent while encumbered in a spacesuit. I have no head for heights, and was glad that several mountaineering enthusiasts had already volunteered for the job.

At last everything was ready. The line had been carefully arranged so that it would lift from the ground with the minimum of hindrance. A light grapnel had been attached to the line a few feet behind the arrow; we hoped that it would catch in the rocks up

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there and wouldn't let us down—all too literally—when we put our trust in it.

This time, however, Trevor was not using a single arrow. He attached four to the line, at two hundred yard intervals. And I shall never forget that incongruous spectacle of the spacesuited figure, gleaming in the last rays of the setting sun, as it drew its bow against the sky.

The arrow sped towards the stars, and before it had lifted more than fifty feet Trevor was already fitting the second one to his improvised bow. It raced after its predecessor, carrying the other end of the long loop that was now being hoisted into space. Almost at once the third followed, lifting its section of line—and I swear that the fourth arrow, with *its* section, was on the way before the first had noticeably slackened its momentum.

Now that there was no question of a single arrow lifting the entire length of line, it was not hard to reach the required altitude. The first two times the grapnel fell back; then it caught firmly somewhere up on the hidden plateau—and the first volunteer began to haul himself up the line. It was true that he weighed only about thirty pounds in this low gravity, but it was still a long fall to the bottom.

He didn't. The stores in the freight rocket started coming down the cliff within the next hour, and everything essential had been lowered before night-fall. I must confess, however, that my satisfaction was considerably abated when one of the engineers proudly showed me the mouth organ he had sent from Earth. Even then I felt certain that we would all be very tired of that instrument before the long lunar night had ended. . . .

But that, of course, was hardly Trevor's fault. As we walked back to the ship together, through the great pools of shadow that were flowing swiftly over the plain, he made a proposal which, I am sure, has puzzled thousands of people ever since the detailed maps of the First Lunar Expedition were published.

After all, it does seem a little odd that a flat and lifeless plain, broken by a single small mountain, should now be labelled on all the charts of the Moon as Sherwood Forest.

Next month, F&SF will bring you two more of these footnotes to the future, in which the Russians introduce botanical genetics to the Moon, and the Americans revolutionize the history of precious stones.

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Recommended Reading

by THE EDITOR

A MAJOR JOY OF THE RECENT 14TH World Science Fiction Convention was the discovery that Al Capp is One of Us. Mr. Capp, who addressed the Convention banquet, proved to be not only a witty and illuminating speaker but also a genuine, authentic, even (to use a Cappian word) slobberin' science fiction fan—no opportunist celebrity taking advantage of a fad to latch onto a little publicity, but a thoroughly well-read and perceptive enthusiast. In other words, Capp has been reading s.f. with the same devout enjoyment with which we read Capp.

Which doubles my pleasure in commending to you AL CAPP'S BALD IGGLE (Simon & Schuster, $1), a gathering of those incidents in the lives of the Yokums which concern this particularly dangerous invader from Lower Slobbovia, the bird whose large and innocent eyes compel people to speak the truth. Like all of Capp's best, the story is a satire and a morality as well as a rowdily funny comedy; it's been almost completely redrawn and rewritten to make it a book rather than a comic-strip reprint; and the result is as satisfying a volume of fantasy humor as you could wish.

Fans in our field have tended to talk too much (if that is possible) about Walt Kelly—who is, one grants, wonderful, but not alone. Anyone who, after BALD IGGLE, fails to recognize that there are at least two American masters of fantasy-satire in comics deserves to have his Pogomobile destroyed.

The loyal Kelly enthusiasts need no notes on THE POGO SUNDAY BOOK (Simon & Schuster, $1); but any who have hitherto escaped the spell of the Okefenokee Swamp and its denizens should know that this first collection of the Sunday (as opposed to daily) Pogo strips represents Kelly at his best . . . and at his closest to science fiction. The sequence in which Owl is deemed a Martian (because he has his head in a teakettle, which seems as good a reason as any) and Pogo and Churchy think they travel between planets is not only one of Kelly's funniest: it contains stimulating and suggestive notes on the nature of interplanetary communication which may well influence the future body of thinking in that vital field.

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In connection with fantasy humor one should note, if a year late, R. E. Williams' A CENTURY OF PUNCH CARTOONS (Simon & Schuster, $4.95), a superb historical compendium analyzing and illustrating the course of that great British magazine from 1841 to 1955 (a generous century!). From our point of view, what is especially interesting is the sharp increase in the number of fantasy and s.f. cartoons in the last few years.

Shel Silverstein is blurbed on the jacket of GRAB YOUR SOCKS (Ballantine, 35¢) as "probably the funniest G.I. cartoonist since Bill Mauldin" (who contributes the introduction); and I shan't argue. Unlike Mauldin, he has the pleasing habit of posing problems in pure fantasy for the military mind to solve. The French cartoonists continue to depict a world in which the fantastic is more probable than the realistic, and 124 examples—not the most brilliant, but an enjoyable lot—are gathered by René Goscinny in FRENCH AND FRISKY (Lion, 25¢).

Reprint department: Most strongly recommended of recent issues is C. M. Kornbluth's NOT THIS AUGUST (Bantam, 35¢), a fine 1955 melodrama which is the only adequate treatment of the overexploited theme of Russian invasion of the United States. J. T. McIntosh's 1953 WORLD OUT OF MIND (Permabooks, 25¢) and Murray Leinster's 1954 OPERATION: OUTER SPACE (Signet, 35¢) are both a bit below their authors' best standards, but good newsstand buys since neither appeared in magazine form. Groff Conklin's 1952 OMNIBUS OF SCIENCE FICTION is condensed to one fourth its original size as SCIENCE FICTION OMNIBUS (Berkley, 35¢), peculiarly managing to omit both the highpoints and the weak spots of the original—a good-enough collection, about like an unspectacular issue of a readable magazine.

Many readers will cheer loudly at the new availability of A. Merritt's THE MOON POOL (Avon, 35¢); and certainly this 1919 fantasy is a bargain in length (107,000 words!). Myself, I find Merritt long on self-conscious Fine Writing and short on characterization and imaginative logic; but I seem to be in a minority among fantasy collectors. Another debatable writer, H. P. Lovecraft, reappears with THE DREAM QUEST OF UNKNOWN KADATH (Shroud, $1.25), a short novel unpublished during HPL's life and available since then only in two small and now hard-to-find printings.

Philip Wylie's TOMORROW! (Popular, 35¢) contains a superb description of atomic devastation in the midst of a wretched soap opera about Civilian Defense. STAR BRIDGE, by Jack Williamson and James E. Gunn (Ace, 35¢), is good socio-historical space opera if you haven't read it often under other titles.

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Mr. Sturgeon says that this is a science fiction story and he can by God prove it. You may decide that it's a fantasy . . . or possibly a mystery . . . or conceivably a surrealist view of straight reality. In other words, it's a story outside of any ordinary commercial category, a story that creates its own genre — and one of the most distinguished stories that F&SF has ever had the pleasure of publishing.

And Now the News .

by THEODORE STURGEON

THE MAN'S NAME WAS MACLYLE, which by looking at you can tell wasn't his real name, but let's say this is fiction, shall we? MacLyle had a good job in—well—a soap concern. He worked hard and made good money and got married to a girl called Esther. He bought a house in the suburbs and after it was paid for he rented it to some people and bought a home a little farther out and a second car and a freezer and a power-mower and a book on landscaping, and settled down to the worthy task of giving his kids all the things he never had.

He had habits and he had hobbies, like everybody else and (like everybody else) his were a little different from anybody's. The one that annoyed his wife the most, until she got used to it, was the news habit, or maybe hobby. MacLyle read a morning paper on the 8:14 and an evening paper on the 6:10, and the local paper his suburb used for its lost dogs and auction sales took up 40 afterdinner minutes. And when he read a paper he read it, he didn't mess with it. He read Page 1 first and Page 2 next, and so on all the way through. He didn't care too much for books but he respected them in a mystical sort of way, and he used to say a newspaper was a kind of book, and so would raise particular hell if a section was missing or in upside down, or if the pages were out of line. He also heard the news on the radio. There were three stations in town with hourly broadcasts, one on the hour, one on the half-hour, and one five minutes before the hour, and he was usually able to catch them all. During these five-minute periods he would look you right in the eye while you talked to him and you'd swear he was listening to you, but he wasn't.

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This was a particular trial to his wife, but only for five years or so. Then she stopped trying to be heard while the radio talked about floods and murders and scandal and suicide. Five more years, and she went back to talking right through the broadcasts, but by the time people are married ten years, things like that don't matter; they talk in code anyway, and nine tenths of their speech can be picked up anytime like ticker-tape. He also caught the 7:30 news on Channel 2 and the 7:45 news on Channel 4 on television.

Now it might be imagined from all this that MacLyle was a crotchety character with fixed habits and a neurotic neatness, but this was far from the case. MacLyle was basically a reasonable guy who loved his wife and children and liked his work and pretty much enjoyed being alive. He laughed easily and talked well and paid his bills. He justified his preoccupation with the news in a number of ways. He would quote Donne: ". . . *any man's death diminishes me, because I am involved in mankind* . . ." which is pretty solid stuff and hard to argue down. He would point out that he made his trains and his trains made him punctual, but that because of them he saw the same faces at the same time day after endless day, before, during, and after he rode those trains, so that his immediate world was pretty circumscribed, and only a constant awareness of what was happening all over the earth kept him conscious of the fact that he lived in a bigger place than a thin straight universe with his house at one end, his office at the other, and a railway track in between.

It's hard to say just when MacLyle started to go to pieces, or even why, though it obviously had something to do with all that news he exposed himself to. He began to react, very slightly at first; that is, you could tell he was listening. He'd *shh!* you, and if you tried to finish what you were saying he'd run and stick his head in the speaker grille. His wife and kids learned to shut up when the news came on, five minutes before the hour until five after (with MacLyle switching stations) and every hour on the half-hour, and from 7:30 to 8 for the TV, and during the 40 minutes it took him to read the local paper. He was not so obvious about it when he read his paper, because all he did was freeze over the pages like a catatonic, gripping the top corners until the sheets shivered, knotting his jaw and breathing from his nostrils with a strangled whistle.

Naturally all this was a weight on his wife Esther, who tried her best to reason with him. At first he answered her, saying mildly that a man has to keep in touch, you know; but very quickly he stopped responding altogether, giving her the treatment a practiced

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suburbanite gets so expert in, as when someone mentions a lawnmower just too damn early on Sunday morning. You don't say yes and you don't say no, you don't even grunt, and you don't move your head or even your eyebrows. After a while your interlocutor goes away. Pretty soon you don't hear these ill-timed annoyances any more than you appear to.

It needs to be said again here that MacLyle was, outside his peculiarity, a friendly and easy-going character. He liked people and invited them and visited them, and he was one of those adults who can really listen to a first-grade child's interminable adventures and really care. He never forgot things like the slow leak in the spare tire or antifreeze or anniversaries, and he always got the storm-windows up in time, but he didn't rub anyone's nose in his reliability. The first thing in his whole life he didn't take as a matter of course was this news thing that started so small and grew so quickly.

So after a few weeks of it his wife took the bull by the horns and spent the afternoon hamstringing every receiver in the house. There were three radios and two TV sets, and she didn't understand the first thing about them, but she had a good head and she went to work with a will and the can-opening limb of a pocket knife. From each receiver she removed one tube, and one at a time, so as not to get them mixed up, she carried them into the kitchen and meticulously banged their bases against the edge of the sink, being careful to crack no glass and bend no pins, until she could see the guts of the tube rolling around loose inside. Then she replaced them and got the back panels on the sets again.

MacLyle came home and put the car away and kissed her and turned on the living-room radio and then went to hang up his hat. When he returned the radio should have been warmed up but it wasn't. He twisted the knobs a while and bumped it and rocked it back and forth a little, grunting, and then noticed the time. He began to feel a little frantic, and raced back to the kitchen and turned on the little ivory radio on the shelf. It warmed up quickly and cheerfully and gave him a clear 60-cycle hum, but that was all. He behaved badly from then on, roaring out the information that the sets didn't work, either of them, as if that wasn't pretty evident by that time, and flew upstairs to the boys' room, waking them explosively. He turned on their radio and got another 60-cycle note, this time with a shattering microphonic when he rapped the case, which he did four times, whereupon the set went dead altogether.

Esther had planned the thing up to this point, but no further, which was the way her mind worked. She figured she could handle it, but

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she figured wrong. MacLyle came downstairs like a pall-bearer, and he was silent and shaken until 7:30, time for the news on TV. The living room set wouldn't peep, so up he went to the boys' room again, waking them just as they were nodding off again, and this time the little guy started to cry. MacLyle didn't care. When he found out there was no picture on the set, he almost started to cry too, but then he heard the sound come in. A TV set has an awful lot of tubes in it and Esther didn't know audio from video. MacLyle sat down in front of the dark screen and litsened to the news. *"Everything seemed to be under control in the riot-ridden border country in India,"* said the TV set. Crowd noises and a background of Beethoven's "Turkish March." *"And then—"* Cut music. Crowd noise up: gabble-wurra and a scream. Announcer over: *"Six hours later, this was the scene."* Dead silence, going on so long that MacLyle reached out and thumped the TV set with the heel of his hand. Then, slow swell, Ketelbey's "In a Monastery Garden." *"On a more cheerful note, here are the six finalists in the Miss Continuum contest."* Background music, "Blue Room," interminably, interrupted only once, when the announcer said through a childish chuckle, *". . . and she meant it!"* MacLyle pounded himself on the temples. The little guy continued to sob. Esther stood at the foot of the stairs wringing her hands. It went on for 30 minutes like this. All MacLyle said when he came downstairs was that he wanted the paper—that would be the local one. So Esther faced the great unknown and told him frankly she hadn't ordered it and wouldn't again, which of course led to a full and righteous confession of her activities of the afternoon.

Only a woman married better than fourteen years can know a man well enough to handle him so badly. She was aware that she was wrong but that was quite overridden by the fact that she was logical. It would not be logical to continue her patience, so patience was at an end. That which offendeth thee, cast it out, yea, even thine eye and thy right hand. She realized too late that the news was so inextricably part of her husband that in casting it out she cast him out too. And out he went, while whitely she listened to the rumble of the garage door, the car door speaking its sharp syllables, clear as *Exit* in a play script; the keen of a starter, the mourn of a motor. She said she was glad and went in the kitchen and tipped the useless ivory radio off the shelf and retired, weeping.

And yet, because true life offers few clean cuts, she saw him once more. At seven minutes to three in the morning she became aware of faint music from somewhere; unaccountably it frightened her, and

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she tiptoed about the house looking for it. It wasn't in the house, so she pulled on MacLyle's trench coat and crept down the steps into the garage. And there, just outside in the driveway, where steel beams couldn't interfere with radio reception, the car stood where it had been all along, and MacLyle was in the driver's seat dozing over the wheel. The music came from the car radio. She drew the coat tighter around her and went to the car and opened the door and spoke his name. At just that moment the radio said ". . . *and now the news*" and MacLyle sat bolt upright and *shh*'d furiously. She fell back and stood a moment in a strange transition from unconditional surrender to total defeat. Then he shut the car door and bent forward, his hand on the volume control, and she went back into the house.

After the news report was over and he had recovered himself from the stab wounds of a juvenile delinquent, the grinding agonies of a derailed train, the terrors of the near-crash of a C-119, and the fascination of a cabinet officer, charter member of the We Don't Trust Nobody Club, saying in exactly these words that there's a little bit of good in the worst of us and a little bit of bad in the best of us, all of which he felt keenly, he started the car (by rolling it down the drive because the battery was almost dead) and drove as slowly as possible into town.

At an all-night garage he had the car washed and greased while he waited, after which the automat was open and he sat in it for three hours drinking coffee, holding his jaw set until his back teeth ached, and making occasional, almost inaudible noises in the back of his throat. At 9:00 he pulled himself together. He spent the entire day with his astonished attorney, going through all his assets, selling, converting, establishing, until when he was finished he had a modest packet of cash and his wife would have an adequate income until the children went to college, at which time the house would be sold, the tenants in the older house evicted, and Esther would be free to move to the smaller home with the price of the larger one added to the basic capital. The lawyer might have entertained fears for MacLyle except for the fact that he was jovial and loquacious throughout, behaving like a happy man—a rare form of insanity, but acceptable. It was hard work but they did it in a day, after which, MacLyle wrung the lawyer's hand and thanked him profusely and checked into a hotel.

When he awoke the following morning he sprang out of bed, feeling years younger, opened the door, scooped up the morning paper and glanced at the headlines.

He couldn't read them.

He grunted in surprise, closed the door gently, and sat on the bed with the paper in his lap. His

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hands moved restlessly on it, smoothing and smoothing until the palms were shadowed and the type hazed. The shouting symbols marched across the page like a parade of strangers in some unrecognized lodge uniform, origins unknown, destination unknown, and the occasion for marching only to be guessed at. He traced the letters with his little finger, he measured the length of a word between his index finger and thumb and lifted them up to hold them before his wondering eyes. Suddenly he got up and crossed to the desk, where signs and placards and printed notes were trapped like a butterfly collection under glass—the breakfast menu, something about valet service, something about checking out. He remembered them all and had an idea of their significance—but he couldn't read them. In the drawer was stationery, with a picture of the building and no other buildings around it, which just wasn't so, and an inscription which might have been in Cyrillic for all he knew. Telegram blanks, a bus schedule, a blotter, all bearing hieroglyphs and runes, as far as he was concerned. A phone book full of strangers' names in strange symbols.

He requested of himself that he recite the alphabet. "A," he said clearly, and "Eh?" because it didn't sound right and he couldn't imagine what would. He made a small foolish grin and shook his head slightly and rapidly, but grin or no, he felt frightened. He felt glad, or relieved—mostly happy anyway, but still a little frightened.

He called the desk and told them to get his bill ready, and dressed and went downstairs. He gave the doorman his parking check and waited while they brought the car round. He got in and turned the radio on and started to drive west.

He drove for some days, in a state of perpetual, cold, and (for all that) happy fright—roller-coaster fright, horror-movie fright—remembering the significance of a stop-sign without being able to read the word STOP across it, taking caution from the shape of a railroad-crossing notice. Restaurants look like restaurants, gas stations like gas stations; if Washington's picture denotes a dollar and Lincoln's five, one doesn't need to read them. MacLyle made out just fine. He drove until he was well into one of those square states with all the mountains and cruised until he recognized the section where, years before he was married, he had spent a hunting vacation. Avoiding the lodge he had used, he took back roads until, sure enough, he came to that deserted cabin in which he had sheltered one night, standing yet, rotting a bit but only around the edges. He wandered in and out of it for a long time, memorizing details because he could not make a list, and then got back into his car and

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drove to the nearest town, not very near and not very much of a town. At the general store he bought shingles and flour and nails and paint—all sorts of paint, in little cans, as well as big containers of house-paint—and canned goods and tools. He ordered a knock-down windmill and a generator, eighty pounds of modeling clay, two loaf pans and a mixing bowl, and a war-surplus jungle hammock. He paid cash and promised to be back in two weeks for the things the store didn't stock, and wired (because it could be done over the phone) his lawyer to arrange for the predetermined $80 a month which was all he cared to take for himself from his assets. Before he left he stood in wonder before a monstrous piece of musical plumbing called an ophicleide which stood, dusty and majestic, in a corner. (While it might be easier on the reader to make this a French horn or a sousaphone—which would answer narrative purposes quite as well—we're done telling lies here. MacLyle's real name is concealed, his home town cloaked, and his occupation disguised, and dammit it really was a twelve-keyed, 1824, 50-inch, obsolete brass ophicleide.) The storekeeper explained how his great grandfather had brought it over from the old country and nobody had played it for two generations except an itinerant tuba-player who had turned pale green on the first three notes and put it down as if it was full of percussion caps. MacLyle asked how it sounded and the man told him, terrible. Two weeks later MacLyle was back to pick up the rest of his stuff, nodding and smiling and saying not a word. He still couldn't read, and now he couldn't speak. Even more, he had lost the power to understand speech. He paid for the purchases with a $100 bill and a wistful expression, and then another $100 bill, and the storekeeper, thinking he had turned deaf and dumb, cheated him roundly but at the same time felt so sorry for him that he gave him the ophicleide. MacLyle loaded up his car happily and left. And that's the first part of the story about MacLyle's being in a bad way.

MacLyle's wife Esther found herself in a peculiar position. Friends and neighbors off-handedly asked her questions to which she did not know the answers, and the only person who had any information at all—MacLyle's attorney—was under bond not to tell her anything. She had not, in the full and legal sense, been deserted, since she and the children were provided for. She missed MacLyle, but in a specialized way; she missed the old reliable MacLyle, and he had, in effect, left her long before that perplexing night when he had driven away. She wanted the old MacLyle back again, not this untrolleyed

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stranger with the grim and spastic preoccupation with the news. Of the many unpleasant facets of this stranger's personality, one glowed brightest, and that was that he was the sort of man who would walk out the way he did and stay away as long as he had. Ergo, he was that undesirable person just as long as he stayed away, and tracking him down would, if it returned him against his will, return to her only a person who was not the person she missed.

Yet she was dissatisfied with herself, for all that she was the injured party and had wounds less painful than the pangs of conscience. She had always prided herself on being a good wife, and had done many things in the past which were counter to her reason and her desires purely because they were consistent with being a good wife. So as time went on she gravitated away from the "what shall I do?" area into the "what ought a good wife to do?" spectrum, and after a great deal of careful thought, went to see a psychiatrist.

He was a fairly intelligent psychiatrist which is to say he caught on to the obvious a little faster than most people. For example he became aware in only four minutes of conversation that MacLyle's wife Esther had not come to him on her own behalf, and further, decided to hear her out completely before resolving to treat her. When she had quite finished and he had dug out enough corroborative detail to get the picture, he went into a long silence and cogitated. He matched the broad pattern of MacLyle's case with his reading and his experience, recognized the challenge, the clinical worth of the case, the probable value of the heirloom diamond pendant worn by his visitor. He placed his fingertips together, lowered his fine young head, gazed through his eyebrows at MacLyle's wife Esther, and took up the gauntlet. At the prospects of getting her husband back safe and sane, she thanked him quietly and left the office with mixed emotions. The fairly intelligent psychiatrist drew a deep breath and began making arrangements with another head-shrinker to take over his other patients, both of them, while he was away, because he figured to be away quite a while.

It was appallingly easy for him to trace MacLyle. He did not go near the lawyer. The solid foundation of all skip tracers and Bureaus of Missing Persons, in their *modus operandi,* is the piece of applied psychology which dictates that a man might change his name and his address, but he will seldom—can seldom—change the things he does, particularly the things he does to amuse himself. The ski addict doesn't skip to Florida, though he might make Banff instead of an habitual Mont Tremblant. A philatelist is not likely to mount butterflies. Hence when the psychia-

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trist found, among MacLyle's papers, some snapshots and brochures, dating from college days, of the towering Rockies, of bears feeding by the roadside, and especially of season after season's souvenirs of a particular resort to which he had never brought his wife and which he had not visited since he married her, it was worth a feeler, which went out in the form of a request to that state's police for information on a man of such-and-such a description driving so-and-so with out-of-state plates, plus a request that the man not be detained nor warned, but only that he, the fairly intelligent psychiatrist, be notified. He threw out other lines, too, but this is the one that hooked his fish. It was a matter of weeks before a state patrol car happened by MacLyle's favorite general store: after that it was a matter of minutes before the information was in the hands of the psychiatrist. He said nothing to MacLyle's wife Esther except goodby for a while, and this bill is payable now, and then took off, bearing with him a bag of tricks.

He rented a car at the airport nearest MacLyle's hideout and drove a long, thirsty, climbing way until he came to the general store. There he interviewed the proprietor, learning some eighteen hundred items about how bad business could get, how hot it was, how much rain hadn't fallen and how much was needed, the tragedy of being blamed for high mark-ups when anyone with the brains God gave a goose ought to know it cost plenty to ship things out here, especially in the small quantities necessitated by business being so bad and all; and betwixt and between, he learned eight or ten items about MacLyle—the exact location of his cabin, the fact that he seemed to have turned into a deaf-mute who was also unable to read, and that he must be crazy beacuse who but a crazy man would want 84 different half-pint cans of house paint or, for that matter, live out here when he didn't have to?

The psychiatrist got loose after a while and drove off, and the country got higher and dustier and more lost every mile, until he began to pray that nothing would go wrong with the car, and sure enough, ten minutes later he thought something had. Any car that made a noise like the one he began to hear was strictly a shot-rod, and he pulled over to the side to worry about it. He turned off the motor and the noise went right on, and he began to realize that the sound was not in the car or even near it, but came from somewhere up hill. There was a mile and a half more of the hill to go, and he drove it in increasing amazement, because that sound got louder and more impossible all the time. It was sort of like music, but like no music currently heard on this or any other planet. It was a solo voice,

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brass, with muscles. The upper notes, of which there seemed to be about two octaves, were wild and unmusical, the middle was rough, but the low tones were like the speech of these mountains themselves, big up to the sky, hot, and more natural than anything ought to be, basic as a bear's fang. Yet all the notes were perfect—their intervals were perfect—this awful noise was tuned like an electronic organ. The psychiatrist had a good ear though for a while he wondered how long he'd have any ears at all, and he realized all these things about the sound, as well as the fact that it was rendering one of the more primitive fingering studies from Czerny, Book One, the droning little horror that goes: *do mi fa sol la sol fa mi, re fa sol la ti la sol fa, mi sol la . . .* etcetera, inchworming up the scale and then descending hand over hand.

He saw blue sky almost under his front tires and wrenched the wheel hard over, and found himself in the grassy yard of a made-over prospector's cabin, but that he didn't notice right away because sitting in front of it was what he described to himself, startled as he was out of his professional detachment, as the craziest-looking man he had ever seen.

He was sitting under a parched, wind-warped Engelmann spruce. He was barefoot up to the armpits. He wore the top half of a skivvy shirt and a hat the shape of one of those conical Boy Scout tents when one of the Boy Scouts has left the pole home. And he was playing, or anyway practicing, the ophicleide, and on his shoulders was a little moss of spruce-needles, a small shower of which descended from the tree every time he hit on or under the low B♭. Only a mouse trapped inside a tuba during band practice can know precisely what it's like to stand that close to an operating ophicleide.

It was MacLyle all right, looming well-fed and filled-out. When he saw the psychiatrist's car he went right on playing, but, catching the psychiatrist's eye, he winked, smiled with the small corner of lip which showed from behind the large cup of the mouthpiece, and twiddled three fingers of his right hand, all he could manage of a wave without stopping. And he didn't stop either until he had scaled the particular octave he was working on and let himself down the other side. Then he put the ophicleide down carefully and let it lean against the spruce tree, and got up. The psychiatrist had become aware, as the last stupendous notes rolled away down the mountain, of his extreme isolation with this offbeat patient, of the unconcealed health and vigor of the man, and of the presence of the precipice over which he had almost driven his car a moment before, and had rolled up his window and buttoned the door-

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lock and was feeling grateful for them. But the warm good humor and genuine welcome on MacLyle's sunburned face drove away fright and even caution, and almost before he knew what he was doing the psychiatrist had the door open and was stooping up out of the car, thinking, merry is a disused word but that's what he is, by God, a merry man. He called him by name but either MacLyle did not hear him or didn't care; he just put out a big warm hand and the psychiatrist took it. He could feel hard flat calluses in MacLyle's hand, and the controlled strength an elephant uses to lift a bespangled child in its trunk; he smiled at the image, because after all MacLyle was not a particularly large man, there was just that feeling about him. And once the smile found itself there it wouldn't go away.

He told MacLyle that he was a writer trying to soak up some of this magnificent country and had just been driving wherever the turn of the road led him, and here he was; but before he was half through he became conscious of MacLyle's eyes, which were in some indescribable way very much on him but not at all on anything he said; it was precisely as if he had stood there and hummed a tune. MacLyle seemed to be willing to listen to the sound until it was finished, and even to enjoy it, but that enjoyment was going to be all he got out of it. The psychiatrist finished anyway and MacLyle waited a moment as if to see if there would be any more, and when there wasn't he gave out more of that luminous smile and cocked his head toward the cabin. MacLyle led the way, with his visitor bringing up the rear with some platitudes about nice place you got here. As they entered, he suddenly barked at that unresponsive back, "Can't you hear me?" and MacLyle, without turning, only waved him on.

They walked into such a clutter and clabber of colors that the psychiatrist stopped dead, blinking. One wall had been removed and replaced with glass panes; it overlooked the precipice and put the little building afloat on haze. All the walls were hung with plain white chenille bedspreads, and the floor was white, and there seemed to be much more light indoors here than outside. Opposite the large window was an oversized easel made of peeled poles, notched and lashed together with baling wire, and on it was a huge canvas, most non-objective, in the purest and most uncompromising colors. Part of it was unquestionably this room, or at least its air of colored confusion here and all infinity yonder. The ophicleide was in the picture, painstakingly reproduced, looking like the hopper of some giant infernal machine, and in the foreground, some flowers; but the

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central figure repulsed him—more, it repulsed everything which surrounded it. It did not look exactly like anything familiar and, in a disturbed way, he was happy about that.

Stacked on the floor on each side of the easel were other paintings, some daubs, some full of ruled lines and overlapping planes, but all in this achingly pure color. He realized what was being done with the dozens of colors of house paint in little cans which had so intrigued the storekeeper.

In odd places around the room were clay sculptures, most mounted on pedestals made of sections of tree-trunks large enough to stand firmly on their sawed ends. Some of the pedestals were peeled, some painted, and in some the bark texture or the bulges or clefts in the wood had been carried right up into the model, and in others clay had been knived or pressed into the bark all the way down to the floor. Some of the clay was painted, some not, some ought to have been. There were free-forms and gollywogs, a marsupial woman and a guitar with legs, and some, but not an overweening number, of the symbolisms which preoccupy even fairly intelligent psychiatrists. Nowhere was there any furniture per se. There were shelves at all levels and of varying lengths, bearing nail-kegs, bolts of cloth, canned goods, tools and cooking utensils. There was a sort of table but it was mostly a workbench, with a vise at one end and at the other, half-finished, a crude but exceedingly ingenious foot-powered potter's wheel.

He wondered where MacLyle slept, so he asked him, and again MacLyle reacted as if the words were not words, but a series of pleasant sounds, cocking his head and waiting to see if there would be any more. So the psychiatrist resorted to sign language, making a pillow of his two hands, laying his head on it, closing his eyes. He opened them to see MacLyle nodding eagerly, then going to the white-draped wall. From behind the chenille he brought a hammock, one end of which was fastened to the wall. The other end he carried to the big window and hung on a hook screwed to a heavy stud between the panes. To lie in that hammock would be to swing between heaven and earth like Mahomet's tomb, with all that sky and scenery virtually surrounding the sleeper. His admiration for this idea ceased as MacLyle began making urgent indications for him to get into the hammock. He backed off warily, expostulating, trying to convey to MacLyle that he only wondered, he just wanted to know: no, *no*, he wasn't tired, dammit; but MacLyle became so insistent that he picked the psychiatrist up like a child sulking at bed-time and carried him to the hammock. Any impulse to kick and quarrel was

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quenched by the nature of this and all other hammocks to be intolerant of shifting burdens, and by the proximity of the large window, which he now saw was built leaning outward, enabling one to look out of the hammock straight down a minimum of four hundred and eighty feet. So all right, he concluded, if you say so. I'm sleepy.

So for the next two hours he lay in the hammock watching MacLyle putter about the place, thinking more or less professional thoughts.

He doesn't or can't speak (he diagnosed): aphasia, motor. He doesn't or can't understand speech: aphasia, sensory. He won't or can't read and write: alexia. And what else?

He looked at all that art—if it *was* art, and any that was, was art by accident—and the gadgetry: the chuntering windmill outside, the sash-weight door-closer. He let his eyes follow a length of clothesline dangling unobtrusively down the leaning centerpost to which his hammock was fastened, and the pulley and fittings from which it hung, and its extension clear across the ceiling to the back wall, and understood finally that it would, when pulled, open two long, narrow horizontal hatches for through ventilation. A small door behind the chenille led to what he correctly surmised was a primitive powder-room, built to overhang the precipice, the most perfect no-plumbing solution for that convenience he had ever seen.

He watched MacLyle putter. That was the only word for it, and his actions were the best example of puttering he had ever seen. MacLyle lifted, shifted, and put things down, backed off to judge, returned to lay an approving hand on the thing he had moved. Net effect, nothing tangible—yet one could not say there was no effect, because of the intense satisfaction the man radiated. For minutes he would stand, head cocked, smiling slightly, regarding the half-finished potter's wheel, then explode into activity, sawing, planing, drilling. He would add the finished piece to the cranks and connecting rods already completed, pat it as if it were an obedient child, and walk away, leaving the rest of the job for some other time. With a wood-rasp he carefully removed the nose from one of his dried clay figures, and meticulously put on a new one. Always there was this absorption in his own products and processes, and the air of total reward in everything. And there was time, there seemed to be time enough for everything, and always would be.

Here is a man, thought the fairly intelligent psychiatrist, in retreat, but in a retreat the like of which my science has not yet described. For observe: he has reacted toward the primitive in terms of supplying himself with his needs with

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his own hands and by his own ingenuity, and yet there is nothing primitive in those needs themselves. He works constantly to achieve the comforts which his history has conditioned him to in the past—electric lights, cross-ventilation, trouble-free waste disposal. He exhibits a profound humility in the low rates he pays himself for his labor: he is building a potter's wheel apparently in order to make his own cooking vessels, and since wood is cheap and clay free, his vessel can only cost him less than engine-turned aluminum by a very low evaluation of his own efforts.

His skills are less than his energy (mused the psychiatrist). His carpentry, like his painting and sculpture, shows considerable intelligence, but only moderate training; he can construct but not beautify, draw but not draft, and reach the artistically pleasing only by not erasing the random shake, the accidental cut; so that real creation in his work is, like any random effect, rare and unpredictable. Therefore his reward is in the area of satisfaction—about as wide a generalization as one can make.

What satisfaction? Not in possessions themselves, for this man could have bought better for less. Not in excellence in itself, for he obviously could be satisfied with less than perfection. Freedom, perhaps, from routine, from dominations of work? Hardly, because for all the complexity of this cluttered cottage, it had its order and its system; the presence of an alarm clock conveyed a good deal in this area. He wasn't dominated by regularity—he used it. And his satisfaction? Why, it must lie in this closed circle, himself to himself, and in the very fact of non-communication!

Retreat . . . retreat. Retreat to savagery and you don't engineer your cross-ventilation or adjust a 500-foot gravity flush for your john. Retreat into infancy and you don't design and build a potter's wheel. Retreat from people and you don't greet a stranger like . . .

Wait.

Maybe a stranger who had something to communicate, or some way of communication, wouldn't be so welcome. An unsettling thought, that. Running the risk of doing something MacLyle didn't like would be, possibly, a little more unselfish than the challenge warranted.

MacLyle began to cook.

Watching him, the psychiatrist reflected suddenly that this withdrawn and wordless individual was a happy one, in his own matrix; further, he had fulfilled all his obligations and responsibilities and was bothering no one.

It was intolerable.

It was intolerable because it was a violation of the prime directive of psychiatry—at least, of that school of psychiatry which he professed, and he was not going to

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confuse himself by considerations of other, less-tried theories—*It is the function of psychiatry to adjust the aberrate to society, and to restore or increase his usefulness to it.* To yield, to rationalize this man's behavior as balance, would be to fly in the face of science itself; for this particular psychiatry finds its most successful approaches in the scientific method, and it is unprofitable to debate whether or not it is or is not a science. To its practitioner it is, and that's that; it has to be. Operationally speaking, what has been found true, even statistically, must be Truth, and all other things, even Possible, kept the hell out of the tool-box. No known Truth allowed a social entity to secede this way, and, for one, this fairly intelligent psychiatrist was not going to give this—this *suicide* his blessing.

He must, then, find a way to communicate with MacLyle, and when he had found it, he must communicate to him the error of his ways. Without getting thrown over the cliff.

He became aware that MacLyle was looking at him, twinkling. He smiled back before he knew what he was doing, and obeyed MacLyle's beckoning gesture. He eased himself out of the hammock and went to the workbench, where a steaming stew was set out in earthenware bowls. The bowls stood on large plates and were surrounded by a band of carefully sliced tomatoes. He tasted them. They were obviously vine-ripened and had been speckled with a dark-green paste which, after studious attention to its aftertaste, he identified as fresh basil mashed with fresh garlic and salt. The effect was symphonic.

He followed suit when MacLyle picked up his own bowl and they went outside and squatted under the old Engelmann spruce to eat. It was a quiet and pleasant occasion, and during it the psychiatrist had plenty of opportunity to size up his man and plan his campaign. He was quite sure now how to proceed, and all he needed was opportunity, which presented itself when MacLyle rose, stretched, smiled, and went indoors. The psychiatrist followed him to the door and saw him crawl into the hammock and fall almost instantly asleep.

The psychiatrist went to his car and got out his bag of tricks. And so it was that late in the afternoon, when MacLyle emerged stretching and yawning from his nap, he found his visitor under the spruce tree, hefting the ophicleide and twiddling its keys in a perplexed and investigatory fashion. MacLyle strode over to him and lifted the ophicleide away with a pleasant I'll-show-you smile, got the monstrous contraption into position, and ran his tongue around the inside of the mouthpiece, large as a demitasse. He had barely time to

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pucker up his lips at the strange taste there before his irises rolled up completely out of sight and he collapsed like a grounded parachute. The psychiatrist was able only to snatch away the ophicleide in time to keep the mouthpiece from knocking out MacLyle's front teeth.

He set the ophicleide carefully against the tree and straightened MacLyle's limbs. He concentrated for a moment on the pulse, and turned the head to one side so saliva would not drain down the flaccid throat, and then went back to his bag of tricks. He came back and knelt, and MacLyle did not even twitch at the bite of the hypodermics: a careful blend of the non-soporific tranquilizers Frenquel, chlorpromazine and Reserpine, and a judicious dose of scopolamine, a hypnotic.

The psychiatrist got water and carefully sponged out the man's mouth, not caring to wait out another collapse the next time he swallowed. Then there was nothing to do but wait, and plan.

Exactly on schedule, according to the psychiatrist's wristwatch, MacLyle groaned and coughed weakly. The psychiatrist immediately and in a firm quiet voice told him not to move. Also not to think. He stayed out of the immediate range of MacLyle's unfocused eyes and explained that MacLyle must trust him, because he was there to help, and not to worry about feeling mixed-up or disoriented. "You don't know where you are or how you got here," he informed MacLyle. He also told MacLyle, who was past 40, that he was 37 years old, but he knew what he was doing.

MacLyle just lay there obediently and thought these things over and waited for more information. He knew he must trust this voice, the owner of which was here to help him; that he was 37 years old; and his name. In these things he lay and marinated. The drugs kept him conscious, docile, submissive and without guile. The psychiatrist observed and exulted: oh you azacyclonol, he chanted silently to himself, you pretty piperidyl, handsome hydrochloride, subtle Serpasil . . . Confidently he left MacLyle and went into the cabin where, after due search, he found some decent clothes and some socks and shoes and brought them out and wrapped the supine patient in them. He helped MacLyle across the clearing and into his car, humming as he did so, for there is none so happy as an expert faced with excellence in his specialty. MacLyle sank back into the cushions and gave one wondering glance at the cabin and at the blare of late light from the bell of the ophicleide; but the psychiatrist told him firmly that these things had nothing to do with him, nothing at all, and MacLyle smiled relievedly and fell to watching the scenery. As they

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passed the general store MacLyle stirred, but said nothing about it. Instead he asked the psychiatrist if the Ardsmere station was open yet, whereupon the psychiatrist could barely answer him for the impulse to purr like a cat: the Ardsmere station, two stops before MacLyle's suburban town, had burned down and been rebuilt almost six years ago; so now he knew for sure that MacLyle was living in a time preceding his difficulties—a time during which, of course, MacLyle had been able to talk. All of this the psychiatrist kept to himself, and answered gravely that yes, they had the Ardsmere station operating again. And did he have anything else on his mind?

MacLyle considered this carefully, but since all the immediate questions were answered—unswervingly, he *knew* he was safe in the hands of this man, whoever he was; he knew (he thought) his correct age and that he was expected to feel disoriented; he was also under a command not to think—he placidly shook his head and went back to watching the road unroll under their wheels. "Fallen Rock Zone," he murmured as they passed a sign. The psychiatrist drove happily down the mountain and across the flats, back to the city where he had hired the car. He left it at the railroad station ("Rail Crossing Road," murmured MacLyle) and made reservations for a compartment on the train, aircraft being too open and public for his purposes and far too fast for the hourly rate he suddenly decided to apply.

They had time for a silent and companionable dinner before train time, and then at last they were aboard.

The psychiatrist turned off all but one reading lamp and leaned forward. MacLyle's eyes dilated readily to the dimmer light, and the psychiatrist leaned back comfortably and asked him how he felt. He felt fine and said so. The psychiatrist asked him how old he was and MacLyle told him, 37, but he sounded doubtful.

Knowing that the scopolamine was wearing off but the other drugs, the tranquilizers, would hang on for a bit, the psychiatrist drew a deep breath and removed the suggestion; he told MacLyle the truth about his age, and brought him up to the here and now. MacLyle just looked puzzled for a few minutes and then his features settled into an expression that can only be described as not unhappy. "Porter," was all he said, gazing at the push-button, and announced that he could read now.

The psychiatrist nodded sagely and offered no comment, being quite willing to let a patient stew as long as he produced essence.

MacLyle abruptly demanded to know why he had lost the powers of speech and reading. The psychiatrist raised his eyebrows a little,

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smiled one of those "You-tell-me" smiles, and then got up and suggested they sleep on it. He got the porter in to fix the beds and as an afterthought told the man to come back with the evening papers. Nothing can orient a cultural expatriate better than the evening papers. The man did. MacLyle paid no attention to this, one way or the other. He just climbed into the psychiatrist's spare pajamas thoughtfully and they went to bed.

The psychiatrist didn't know if MacLyle had awakened him on purpose or whether the train's slowing had done it, anyway he awoke about three in the morning to find MacLyle standing beside his bunk looking at him fixedly. He noticed, too, that MacLyle's reading lamp was lit and the papers were scattered all over the floor. MacLyle said, "You're some kind of a doctor," in a flat voice.

The psychiatrist admitted it.

MacLyle said, "Well, this ought to make some sense to you. I was skiing out here years ago when I was a college kid. Accident, fellow I was with broke his leg. Compound. Made him comfortable as I could and went for help. Came back, he'd slid down the mountain, thrashing around, I guess. Crevasse, down in the bottom; took two days to find him, three days to get him out. Frostbite. Gangrene."

The psychiatrist tried to look as if he was following this.

MacLyle said, "The one thing I always remember, him pulling back the bandages all the time to look at his leg. Knew it was gone, couldn't keep himself from watching the stuff spread around and upward. Didn't like to; *had* to. Tried to stop him, finally had to help him or he'd hurt himself. Every ten, fifteen minutes all the way down to the lodge, fifteen hours, looking under the bandages."

The psychiatrist tried to think of something to say and couldn't.

MacLyle said, "That Donne, that John Donne I used to spout, I always believed that."

The psychiatrist began to misquote the thing about send not to ask for whom the bell . . .

"Yeah, that, but especially *'any man's death diminishes me, because I am involved in mankind.'* I believed that," MacLyle repeated. "I believed more than that. Not only death. Damn foolishness diminishes me because I am involved. People all the time pushing people around diminishes me. Everybody hungry for a fast buck diminishes me." He picked up a sheet of newspaper and let it slip away; it flapped off to the corner of the compartment like a huge gravemoth. "I was getting diminished to death and I had to watch it happening to me like that kid with the gangrene, so that's why." The train, crawling now, lurched suddenly and yielded. MacLyle's eyes flicked to the window, where neon

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beer signs and a traffic light were reluctantly being framed. MacLyle leaned close to the psychiatrist. "I just had to get un-involved with mankind before I got diminished altogether, everything mankind did was my fault. So I did and now here I am involved again." MacLyle abruptly went to the door. "And for that, thanks."

The psychiatrist asked him what he was going to do.

"Do?" asked MacLyle cheerfully. "Why, I'm going out there and diminish mankind right back." He was out in the corridor with the door closed before the psychiatrist so much as sat up. He banged it open again and leaned in. He said in the sanest of all possible voices, "Now mind you, doctor, this is only one man's opinion," and was gone. He killed four people before they got him.

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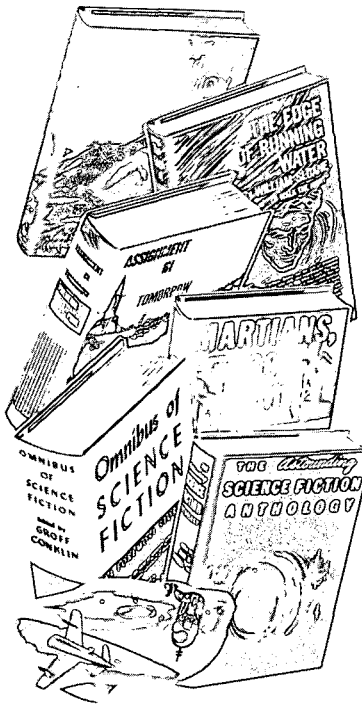

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